

Latino Identity and the Immigration Rights Movement of 2006: The Origins and Consequences of an Assimilationist Approach

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**LATINO IDENTITY AND THE IMMIGRATION RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF 2006:
The Origins and Consequences of an Assimilationist Approach**

by

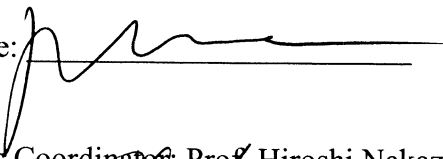
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Abstract

In December of 2005, the United States House of Representatives passed the infamous Sensenbrenner-King immigration reform legislation that, if written into law, would have negatively affected the situation of millions of undocumented workers in the United States, mostly originating from Latin America. In response, the Latino community in the U.S. mobilized to organize a wave of rallies across the country during the spring of 2006. This thesis explores the construction of the collective action frame employed by movement organizers to mobilize protesters. It ultimately finds that the rhetoric of assimilation was chosen because of its ability to resonate both with the goal of effecting political change as well as with the identity of the potential audience. It was nevertheless found to be inadequate in addressing the larger issues of injustice affecting immigrants as it served to reinforce and perpetuate the oppression of consciousness that has often left Latinos feeling that their heritage must be rejected in order to be deemed worthy of certain rights in the United States. While movement organizers managed to mobilize millions of people across the country, their influence on legislation has yet to be seen, as no immigration reforms have been written into law as of the writing of this thesis.

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Chapter 1

In 2005 and 2006, the debate over immigration reform bills in Congress and the organization of immigration rights rallies throughout the country brought immigration, particularly in the context of Latin America, to the forefront of national issues in the United States. The immediacy of this issue continues to be strongly felt in 2007, as this study is being written. Immigration has been framed both as an issue of national security and economic well-being, though questions of cultural identity and racism have also been clearly brought out in the public debate. From the perspective of those involved in the rallies and marches, however, at the heart of it all has been a struggle aimed at gaining the benefits of citizenship. Various tactics were pursued in this struggle, but the dominant one was a cry for assimilation: bring your American flag, and profess your desire to pursue the American dream.

The rallies of 2006 represented an unprecedented opportunity for members of the Latino community to mobilize in response to the threat of what they considered unjust reform legislation that would affect them adversely. As a minority community in the United States, Latinos are faced with many injustices, and the potential to organize a social movement addressing these injustices was a chance for Latino voices to be heard and create change in U.S. society. It is also clear, however, from looking at the dynamics of immigration from south to north, that an imbalance in power relations exists not only on a domestic scale within the United States, but also on an international scale between the United States and Latin America. The phenomenon of immigration is a direct result

of disparate economic situations, as most immigrants are seeking economic opportunity on their journey north. Given these interconnections, it is important to evaluate the message of this social movement in regard to how effectively it addresses all levels of the injustice being experienced by immigrant communities, both in their home countries and in the United States.

This study is particularly interested in understanding why the struggle was framed as a move toward assimilation, and exploring the potential implications of this frame for Latino identity. It will also seek to compare this frame with other frames that could have been employed to mobilize protesters around a common identity, asking how organizers of the movement may have limited their frame in relation to what they could hope to achieve in the given political opportunity. Also under consideration will be the question posed above, as to whether or not the rhetorical strategies used were consistent with addressing the broader levels of injustice that are experienced internationally but result in consequences domestically.

To better understand how these tactics evolved, the main body of this work will be concerned with identifying and characterizing the relevant rhetoric within the immigration legislation debate. In Chapter 2, the dominant rhetoric surrounding immigration in public discourse before the rallies will be discussed. Chapters 3 and 4 will then examine the frames and counter-frames put forth in the immigration rights struggle by activists on both sides of the debate. In order to analyze and draw conclusions in Chapters 5 and 6 about the genesis of the rhetoric and frames to be discussed, we will first examine in this chapter the theoretical literature on collective action frames and the

historical and contemporary situation of Latin American immigrants in the United States. This will include a review of one of the most significant Latino social movements in the past century, a summary of the historical and current legislation surrounding immigration, and a brief portrait of the social and economic situation of Latino immigrants in U.S. society today.

Review of Literature on Collective Action Frames

In thinking about how audiences are mobilized to participate in a social movement, it is important to explore the literature on collective action frames. This review will provide insight into what kinds of considerations organizers must make when attempting to mobilize an audience, and will also consider how the creation of collective action frames is a dynamic process that is born out of the dialogue between activists on both sides of the issue.

The framing process has been described as “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (Esacove 2004, 71). These created understandings of self and the world result from a process that “is situated in, constrained by, and draws from the existing relational setting of public narratives, social practices, and institutions” (Esacove 2004, 71). In other words, the formation of a collective action frame must recognize the ways in which the standard public discourse has influenced and will continue to influence the potential audience members’ own identity as well as their perceptions of the world. This does not exclude from the discussion aspects of the

audience's identity and worldview that are not predicated on this understanding of the status quo, as the formation of an effective collective action frame must take both sides of the audience's identity into consideration.

In considering the audience to be mobilized, framers must recognize that “few individuals possess single, unified identities; most people juggle and combine, categorical and political, embedded and disjoined identities” (Tarrow 1998, 107). Reconciling these internal identities and emerging with one frame that will suffice to encompass them all is one challenge the organizers face. Additionally, however, this identity is also projected out to the public and thus framers must take into consideration the interplay between the multiple audiences they will be addressing. Thus, the pre-existing needs and identities of individuals within the social movement are factors in shaping a collective identity, as is the fact that internal rhetoric will always be projected to multiple audiences. These two factors are then mediated by the goals of the movement; as Jeremy Holman points out, this creation “results from the continual conflict and negotiation over the definition of the situation of members and the ends and means of collective action” (Holman 2005, 11-12). We will return to a discussion of the role that goals play later in this section.

It is important to note that in trying to construct an appropriate frame for the social movement, organizers will always be confronted with “an established political environment composed of a number of critically important constituent publics with very different interests vis-à-vis the movement” (McAdam 1996, 340). However, it must be emphasized that this “established political environment” is not in a static, fixed position. Esacove has found that in much of the literature on counter-frames, the “fluidity of

oppositional movements' framing processes is apparent," but "one gets the sense that master frames are inert objects, standing solidly alone against the claims of its opponents" (Esacove 2004, 71). The master frame is portrayed as gradually losing its ability to mobilize an audience as counter-movements "find cracks to exploit in the wall or to slowly erode the wall over time" (Esacove 2004, 72).

Esacove, however, discounts this theory in favor of a more dynamic process: "rather than a unidirectional bombardment, frames and counterframes evolve in relationship to each other and cannot be disentangled from each other" (Esacove 2004, 72). Throughout the lifetime of the movement, organizers will thus be continually re-framing their position in response to their environment and the changes it undergoes. The initial environment will influence the creation of the first collective action frame employed, and the rise of oppositional social movements and their counter-framing will provide the rhetorical message to which a social movement may subsequently choose to respond; in effect, as Esacove notes, frames will always be "constructed in response to something else, whether the efforts of a counter-movement or the conditions that motivated action in the first place. Social movement actors are further constrained and supported by the larger cultural, social, and historical context" (Esacove 2004, 95).

It is in understanding the interplay between these different actors and their frames that allows us to see how, as Tarrow puts it, "meaning is constructed out of social and political interaction with supporters and opponents," and how the "process of struggle" informs the evolution of symbolic discourse (Tarrow 1998, 107-108). When deciding how to put forth their message, "movement entrepreneurs choose [symbols] that they

hope will mediate among the cultural understandings of the people they wish to appeal to, their own beliefs and aspirations, and their situation of struggle” (Tarrow 1998, 109). The difficulties in finding a message that will resonate with all of these goals are many.

Tarrow outlines three: the genuine desire to remain within the boundaries of a political consensus, the ability of the state to re-frame confrontational messages as consensus, and the problems that arise from using the media – a non-neutral medium – to communicate with the broader public (Tarrow 1998, 114).

Looking at how organizers decide on frames, Ellen Reese and Garnett Newcombe note that in many early studies of collective action frames it was suggested that social movement organizations “tend to construct collective action frames strategically to maximize membership and political support in light of cultural conditions” (Reese and Newcombe 2003, 294). However, Reese and Newcombe argue that despite existing political and cultural constraints, a range of framing alternatives are still available to social movement organizers. Understanding the choices that are made requires taking into account whether organizers wish to construct a frame for instrumental or expressive reasons (Reese and Newcombe 2003, 295). Here, we return to the role that the goals of movement organizers play in creating a collective action frame.

Gary Steward, Thomas Shriver, and Amy Chasteen explain this distinction by characterizing instrumental movements as ones which “seek to change the structure of society and are fundamentally political, while expressive movements are primarily concerned with changing the individual” (Steward, Shriver, and Chasteen 2001, 109). In deciding whether the instrumental or expressive function of a social movement is to be

emphasized, framers will find that more suitable collective action frames will emerge based on this decision. As Tarrow puts it, framers will “orient their frames toward action in particular contexts and fashion them at the intersection between a target population’s culture and their own values and goals” (Tarrow 1998, 110).

Thus, we see how collective action frames are important conceptual frameworks that help us to understand the identity and goals of a social movement. It is also clear, however, that these are not static frames constructed in a vacuum, and any conclusions we reach must also be informed by the message oppositional actors put forth and the presence of bystanders in the external environment.

Review of Previous Latino Social Movements

In talking about the immigration rights movement from the perspective of Latinos in the United States, it is helpful to put this movement and its rhetoric in the historical context of other social movements orchestrated by the Latino population. The roots and example of the Chicano movement of the 1960s, called the “most intense epoch of Mexican-American political and cultural protest to date,” provide an interesting contextualization into the history of this rhetoric. Understanding this history will establish a standard to which we can compare the current goals and strategies of the movement organizers as mediated by their rhetorical message. It will also be helpful in answering questions concerning how and why the rhetoric has changed over time, as well as what these changes say about the evolution of Latino identity in the context of these movements.

Amidst the growing discontent within U.S. civil society during the 1960s, Mexican-Americans added their voices to the protests at the end of this tumultuous decade. The Chicano movement was new and innovative in that it broke with the prevailing strategy of previous ethnic leaders to gain civil rights. These previous leaders had attempted to present themselves as worthy citizens by using a definition of good citizenship that, ever since the establishment of the U.S. Constitution of 1789, had been enshrined in U.S. “political, legal, and popular culture.” The main characterizations of the ideal citizen were put forth as “white, male, and willing to serve his country during wartime” (Oropeza 2003, 202). Instead of attempting to fit themselves into this definition, the members of the Chicano movement instead “crafted a new understanding of themselves as a people of color, as a colonized people, and as women and men who together had struggled against oppression for centuries” (Oropeza 2003, 202).

The pre-World War II rhetoric surrounding rights for Mexican-Americans was dominated by voices like those within the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). This advocacy group formed in Texas, and faced with discrimination against people of Mexican descent it chose to try and assimilate the Mexican-American experience into the traditional understanding of citizenship as outlined above. The League was mostly composed of males, and letters of protest and press releases “constantly maintained that Mexican Americans, albeit of mixed indigenous and European background, were ‘white’” (Oropeza 2003, 204). After World War II, and the loyal service of many Mexican-Americans during the war, LULAC worked with the American G.I. forum to “argue successfully against the segregation of Mexican-

descended people on the grounds that they were ‘white’” (Oropeza 2003, 205). It is important to note that LULAC was not fighting to end segregation, but rather to have it recognized that Mexican-Americans should be segregated with the whites instead of the lower class black population. These tactics continued to dominate Mexican-American advocacy groups until the rise of the Chicano movement in the 1960s.

Several factors during this era led to an increasingly radical rhetoric surrounding the appeal for civil rights. The presence of the African-American civil rights movement helped many Mexican-Americans make the connection between their own experience of socioeconomic barriers and that of the African-American population. The radical call to Black Power began to be echoed by Mexican-American activists in the form of Chicano cultural nationalism.

The platform of the movement was founded on “rejecting assimilation,” and advocated for “Chicano autonomy in the realms of education, culture, and politics as a means of obtaining ‘total liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism’” (Oropeza 2003, 208). The movement completely rejected the idea of catering to a definition of citizenship as white, male, and military, promoting instead the opposite characteristics: brown, female and male, and anti-war. The definitive symbol of the movement was that of “Aztlán,” the indigenous Aztec name for the U.S. Southwest that linked “Latinos” in the United States to both their “Brown brothers” in Latin America and to all oppressed Third World peoples (Oropeza 2003, 213). It was a symbol that empowered activists to base their “claim for legitimacy... not upon their willingness to die in battle but upon their status as natives to the continent” (Oropeza 2003, 213).

In understanding the rhetoric of Chicano cultural nationalism in light of the literature on collective action frames, it is important to identify for what purpose the movement was attempting to mobilize. While the group demanded certain civil rights, it was not attempting to persuade fully enfranchised members of society that its cause was just or to instrumentally change the structure of society through political means. In fact, the proponents of this philosophy felt that since their second-class status in society was a “logical consequence of Anglo-American racism, exploitation, and oppression... the burden did not fall upon people of Mexican descent to prove themselves worthy of first-class citizenship” (Oropeza 2003, 216). Their rhetoric was indeed chosen with the expressive goal of “changing the individual,” but the individuals addressed in the rhetoric were Mexican-Americans themselves. The goal was to transform the oppressed consciousness of Mexican-Americans in order to create individuals willing to stand up and demand, not beg for, their rights. Thus, the movement chose to base its identity in the transformative identity of a “Chicano,” creating powerful symbols like that of Aztlán to connect Mexican-Americans with their heritage, and to frame their struggle for civil rights not as one dependent on the consensus or approval of the general U.S. public, but as a natural right that does not need to be “given.”

While this paper is concerned with the contemporary moment, understanding the history behind the rhetoric surrounding Latinos and citizenship provides us with an interesting context and useful perspective from which we can analyze the choices made about framing and the use of rhetoric by the organizers of the 2006 movement. As the frame put forth in this contemporary movement was largely promoting assimilation, the

question becomes concerned with identifying the particular circumstances present within the situation today that necessitated the chosen frame, and how we can understand the role of the lessons learned regarding the oppressed consciousness of Latinos in the context of this contemporary situation of struggle.

The Contemporary Social and Economic Situation of Immigrants

The Chicano movement took place during a time period of outright discrimination against racial minorities in the United States. The civil rights movement has done much to improve the situation, but unfortunately the social and economic position of Latinos today leaves much to be desired. The situation of Latinos is particularly unique amongst minorities in the U.S. because of the effect that international policies between the United States and Latin America have on the situation of Latinos domestically and on their family and friends who remain in their countries of origin. Their struggle is thus more than a struggle for civil rights, as it also encompasses the question of their very presence within the country as “legal” or “illegal,” and what that will mean for their social and economic well-being, as well as that of their loved ones in their home countries. The authority of the United States to decide their fate on this issue leaves immigrants particularly powerless, and contributes to their marginalized position in society. On an international scale, the struggle is expanded to include the need for an economic situation that will eliminate the need for immigration to the United States in the first place. This section will attempt to outline the dynamics of this international situation, as well as the manifestation of these issues both domestically in the U.S and in immigrants’ native

countries.

According to research done by the Pew Hispanic Center, as of January 2006 there were approximately 11.5-12 million unauthorized migrants living in the U.S., with 78 percent of this population originating from Latin America (56 percent from Mexico and 22 percent from the rest of Latin America, predominantly from Central America) (Passel 2006, 2, 4). The majority of these migrants undertook a dangerous journey from their homeland in order to cross the border into the United States. An average of 375 people died on the border each year between 2000 and 2006.¹

Here, we must also expand our analysis beyond the border and begin to look at the effects of emigration on Latin American countries. For example, it is estimated that close to two million Salvadorans have emigrated to the United States, while the population of El Salvador is approximately six million – in other words, one-fourth of Salvadorans live in the United States.² This reality affects both the social and economic landscape of the country. The separation of families as a result of emigration creates its own set of social difficulties, as does the influx of cultural values and images from the United States. Additionally, in Central America and the Caribbean particularly, the remittances sent from the U.S. constitute up to 24.5 percent of GDP, with Haiti being the most extreme example (Orozco 2003, 5). This situation of high rates of emigration to the United States and dependence on remittances sent home from abroad to sustain the domestic economy can only be understood in the context of the great economic disparity

¹ Latin America Working Group, “Migrant Deaths 2000-2006,”
<<http://www.lawg.org/countries/mexico/death-stats.htm>>.

² “Latin America: Trade, Remittances,” 2004,
<http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=2974_0_2_0>.

that exists between the United States and its southern neighbors.

This situation of economic disparity that has existed ever since the Americas were colonized by European forces is in many ways institutionalized and perpetuated by trade policies today. Examples of this are the trade liberalization agreements that have been signed between Mexico (NAFTA) and Central America (CAFTA) and the United States. In Mexico, NAFTA has not helped reduce inequality. A report by the Latin America Working Group confirmed that the already existing technological disparities and differences in subsidies have “allowed large-scale agribusinesses to flourish” and “resulted in a flood of low-cost US goods to Mexico with which most Mexican farmers are unable to compete.”³

Given the nature of the lack of economic opportunity in Latin America that is the main impetus behind the migration flows toward the United States, it is consistent with the logic of the global economy that the opportunities for immigrants upon arriving are the ones viewed as least desirable by the U.S. public. Though representing only 4.9 percent of the work force, unauthorized workers account for 24 percent of farming occupations, 21 percent of private household workers, 14 percent of construction jobs, and 12 percent of food preparation positions. In comparison to only 16 percent of native workers, 31 percent of immigrants were working in service occupations. Given the benefits to employers of this kind of cheap and potentially exploitable labor, the resolution of the immigration issue has been difficult to achieve politically, as a solution must take into account the desire for both secure borders and the need for labor (Passel

³ Latin America Working Group, “NAFTA in Mexico: Lessons for a Central American Free Trade Agreement,” <http://www.wola.org/economic/brief_cafta_nafta_lessons.pdf>.

2006, 11).

The nature of this situation is essential to understand in relation to how it is incorporated into a collective action frame. The fact that Latinos and immigrants are marginalized within society and that immigrants in particular are subject to the whims of the United States government regarding their legal status has important implications for the kind of shared identity and understanding of the world that can be reached. Their precarious economic situation, especially when expanded to include family in home countries, also factors into this understanding. Thus, these material conditions as well as the power relations that put the United States in a position of domination are important in understanding what was being reacted to in the rallies of 2006, as well as in analyzing how and why a particular collective action frame came to be.

Review of the Historical and Contemporary Situation of Migration in the United States and Latin America

The power relations described above are manifested clearly in the legislative authority the United States holds over immigration policy. The nature of immigration flows underwent various changes in the 20th century, and the number and demographics of the immigrant population are intricately tied to the different acts of legislation that have passed through the U.S. Congress over the years. The immigration rights rallies organized in 2006 were responding directly to the threat of immigration reform legislation that would adversely affect their situation. This section will outline the history of legislation, particularly as it has affected Latin American immigration, and will provide a summary of the Congressional bills put forth in late 2005 and early 2006. This

will help inform both the discussion of U.S. public opinion on the issue as well as help further pinpoint the material situation to which protesters were responding.

The first time the federal government of the United States took control from the states over immigration policy was in 1875. The government aimed its legislation at keeping out undesirables, such as “paupers, criminals, and the insane” (Reimers 1998, 13), as well as persons of particular religions, races, or nationalities: legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 reflected the increasingly xenophobic and nativist sentiments within the country. Similar to the concerns heard today, apprehensions were raised that immigrants were overwhelming the economy and were more prone to criminality and radicalism than native-born citizens. Cultural and racial fears were also influential, as the U.S. Congress passed national origins quotas in 1929 with the help of a eugenics expert, clearly demonstrating that “Washington wanted the nation’s ethnic make up to remain as it was in 1920” (Reimers 1998, 22).

Interestingly, in the early 20th century immigration from Latin America, and particularly Mexico, was not as large a concern for the government as Asian and European immigration. In fact, the main targets of the Border Patrol upon its creation in 1924 were the illegal Chinese and European immigrants being smuggled into the country along the Mexican-U.S. border. Despite strong racist sentiments towards Mexicans and other Latin Americans, immigration was less regulated for these groups both because of the economic benefits brought by the low wage labor these immigrants provided, particularly in the area of agriculture, along with the near impossibility of patrolling the entire border. Realistically, the Border Patrol was only able to cover “about 10 percent of

the nearly 2,000-mile-long border” (Andreas 2000, 36). Evidence that tolerance for immigration was tied closely to the need for labor was the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans during the Great Depression, followed by the institutionalization of migrant labor as a result of labor shortages during World War II (Andreas 2000, 32, 33).

The first program institutionalizing migrant labor for Mexicans in the United States was called the Bracero program, which was in effect from 1942-1964. While it was meant to provide a legal means for a cheap labor force to enter contractually into the U.S. economy, its unintended consequence was to encourage workers without a Bracero contract to look for work north of the border. By 1954, the levels of illegal immigration had increased so significantly that “Operation Wetback” was put into effect, resulting in the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans. Nevertheless, the stream of labor continued to flow south to north, and with the ending of the Bracero program the situation of migrant labor simply moved from becoming a formal to an informal system – employers were now used to this labor supply and were not subject to legal penalties for hiring illegal immigrants as workers. The 1965 and 1976 immigration legislation that put limits on Western Hemisphere immigrant visas had no real effect other than to change the legal status of immigrants, as the U.S. government did not make a concentrated effort to control this flow of workers - “illegal entry remained a relatively simple and inexpensive activity” (Andreas 2000, 33-35).

As the migration of the Mexican labor force provided economic benefits for both Mexico, in the form of remittances, and the United States, in the form of cheap labor, the

flow of labor eventually became more entrenched and immigrants began to take more visible jobs in the service and construction industries. By the late 1970s, the more visible status of immigrants in the workforce served to politicize the issue and led to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). This act attempted to curb illegal immigration by penalizing employers of undocumented workers and expanding the border patrol, with the tradeoff being the legalization of some two million illegal immigrants residing in the country. These measures did little to control illegal immigration, and instead provided a base of newly legalized immigrants that would help facilitate the arrival of their family members and others within their social network, as well as create the basis for a black market in forged documents. The 1980s did see a decrease in apprehensions by the Border Patrol, but less than a decade later illegal immigration had once again exploded and become a major flashpoint in U.S. politics (Andreas 2000, 38-9).

The 1990 Immigration Act allowed for immediate family members of U.S. citizens to immigrate, facilitating family reunification for many, including those legalized under IRCA.⁴ This increase in immigrants, combined with an economy in recession, led to growing public opposition against immigration. In response, the Clinton administration began to take on more measures to secure the border. The Immigration and Naturalization Services' Border Patrol organization initiated several operations along the U.S.-Mexican border beginning in 1993 to try and deter immigrants from crossing the border. Operation Hold-the-Line in El Paso, Texas (1993), Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, California

⁴ Population Resource Center, 2004, "U.S. Immigration: A Legislative History," <<http://www.prcdc.org/USImmigrationsLegHistory.pdf>>.

(1994), and Operation Rio Grande in East Texas (1997) were all well publicized efforts to stem illegal immigration (Andreas 1998-99, 594, 596).

A new round of debate over legislation began in Congress in 1994, and eventually resulted in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Reimers 1998, 141). While this act preserved the rate of legal immigration, it made illegal immigrants ineligible for Social Security benefits. It also allocated more funding to the INS for border patrol purposes as well as to fund deportations. The simultaneous passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform law affected immigrants in that it barred legal immigrants arriving after 1996 from receiving most types of welfare assistance for their first five years in the country, as well as completely banning illegal immigrants from most public assistance. It also mandated an income of 125 percent above the poverty line in order for a legal immigrant to sponsor the arrival of one's relatives.⁵

A decade after the 1996 legislation was passed, a new immigration debate began to rage. After the events of September 11, 2001, the rhetoric of national security emerged as an increasingly dominant concern and resulted in renewed calls to close the borders of the United States and put a stop to illegal immigration. As a culmination of these sentiments, the House of Representatives passed the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005" in December of 2005, proposed by House Judiciary Chairman James Sensenbrenner and Homeland Security Chairman Peter King.⁶ Some of the major provisions of the bill that resulted in the most debate included making

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sensenbrenner, F. James and King, Peter, 2005, "The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," <<http://judiciary.house.gov/media/pdfs/immbillsection.pdf>>.

“unauthorized presence” in the United States a felony rather than a civil offense, establishing a national electronic database that would help employers verify the legal status of workers as well as increasing fines for employers who fail to do so, defining activities such as housing, transporting, or employing undocumented immigrants – knowingly or unknowingly – as a crime punishable with prison time, and allocating billions of dollars to build a fence along parts of the U.S.-Mexican border.⁷

In response to this bill, the Senate introduced its own immigration reform bill in March of 2006 that differed substantially from the House version. It created a pathway to legalization for ten out of the eleven to twelve million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., kept “unauthorized presence” a civil offense, and did not define humanitarian activities that aid undocumented immigrants as crimes.⁸ What became known as the Hagel-Martinez compromise was introduced to the Senate in April of 2006; this bill included provisions for the legalization of undocumented immigrants depending on the amount of time they had lived in the U.S. while also including some of the same provisions from the House bill, such as the verification system and harsher penalties for employers of undocumented immigrants, along with the provision of funds for stronger border control.⁹ Instead of conferencing these bills over the summer session, the House held forums across the country to hear public opinion on the issues. Ultimately, Congress failed to pass any legislation as the mid-term elections in November of 2006 made compromise a sensitive political issue that could have cost Senators and Representatives

⁷ University of California Santa Barbara, 2006, “2005-2006 Legislation Summary,” <<http://aad.english.ucsb.edu/sumoflegis.html>>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

their seats. New reform legislation will be undertaken by the 110th Congress, which convened in January of 2007.¹⁰

This history of legislation relating to immigration makes it clear that despite all attempts to discourage immigration, it is a phenomenon that cannot be eradicated through the types of control measures being tried. The legislation does serve the purpose, however, of making the situation much more complicated for immigrants. Increased border patrol has made the journey across the border dangerous to the point of death, the illegal status of immigrants makes the potential to be exploited by employers more likely, and the denial of welfare benefits makes finding a situation of economic security more difficult. The Sensenbrenner-King legislation would have increased the precariousness of the immigrant position dramatically; as a result, it became the central issue around which action was mobilized. The fact of this political opportunity is essential to consider when identifying factors that influenced the creation of the collective action frame used in mobilizing the protesters.

From here we will shift into a discussion of the rhetoric surrounding this movement, beginning with the initial characterization of the immigration issue before the rallies began. Later in Chapters 5 and 6 we will return to these discussions of the Chicano movement, immigration legislation, and the contemporary situation of immigrants in the United States to further our analysis of the collective action frames employed by the immigration rights movement of 2006.

¹⁰ Bangoura, Alseny Ben, 2006, "For immigrants and their advocates, 2006 is one of the most momentous years," <<http://www.africalog.com/info2.html>>.

Chapter 2

In order to understand the way in which the emerging immigration rights movement framed its identity, we will first need to look at the rhetoric that was used to frame immigration both in the media and by anti-illegal immigrant groups before the rallies took place. It is this frame that the activists within the immigration rights movement had the opportunity to either respond to or ignore when constructing their original rhetorical message. Thus, in this section we will identify and characterize the rhetoric put forth by the mainstream media concerning immigration, as well as that used by the infamous anti-illegal immigrant groups known as the Minutemen, as well as two other organizations, Americans for Immigration Control and the Federation for American Immigration Reform. What we ultimately find is that the rhetoric in the time period leading up to the immigration rights rallies intricately tied immigration to terrorism, violence, drug trafficking, crime, gangs, cheap labor, a drain on U.S. resources, and disintegrating U.S. culture.

While most of these characterizations are decidedly negative, the one positive benefit that immigration was often portrayed as bringing to the United States was a labor force unavailable from the U.S. population. As is clear from the history of Latin American immigration to the U.S. and the current situation of the immigrant workforce, the need for cheap labor is one of the central issues in the debate. In speaking publicly on this issue, President George W. Bush stated that “agriculture relies upon a lot of people

willing to do the work that others won't do. And it seems like to me that there ought to be a legal way to make this happen so that – but without creating a sense of amnesty or permanency.”¹

By explicitly stating that immigrants are welcome in this country only insofar as they are “willing to do the work that others won't do,” the President helped to characterize immigrants as a commodity; it is implied in his statement that these immigrants' value should be seen strictly in relation to their economic contribution to society, as opposed to recognizing their inherent value as human beings – they are wanted for their work, but the consequences of “permanency” must be avoided. As this rhetoric serves to dehumanize immigrants, it also makes it easier to judge them based solely on an economic basis, instead of prioritizing rights due to them as human beings.

This point was furthered in other rhetoric that continuously deemed immigrants an unjust drain on resources that should be going to U.S. citizens. In an interview with Bill O'Reilly on Fox News, Ann Linehan, the editor of a website called bloghouston.net, described the impact of immigrants on Houston as such: “Well, for example, many of the city services are impacted heavily. The hospitals, trauma centers, mental health services are all in various crisis, money shortage because of all the money that must be spent to provide for these people.”² In discussing the death of migrants in Arizona as a result of crossing the U.S.-Mexican border on CBS' 60 Minutes, Ed Bradley noted that “there are so many bodies they won't fit in the vaults in the coroner's morgue.”³ Dr. Bruce Parks,

¹ “Remarks by President George W. Bush,” February 17, 2006.

² O'Reilly, Bill, January 5, 2006, “Texas Impacted by Illegal Immigration.”

³ Bradley, Ed, December 11, 2005, “For December 11, 2005.”

the Tucson Medical Examiner featured on the show, then described the cost of the situation, explaining that the county must use a “refrigerated truck that we’ve had to rent at the cost of \$1,000 a week.”⁴

This kind of rhetoric appeals to a sense of individuality that is valued in U.S. society. Immigrants who take away from U.S. resources, regardless if this is for humanitarian reasons, are seen to be perpetrating an injustice against U.S. society, as they have no right to these resources. Emphasizing the adverse effects that immigrants are having economically on the country thus serves to provide a reason for rejecting their presence, as well as legitimating the denial of these kinds of services, despite the humanitarian consequences.

Another major concern that appeared in the rhetoric surrounding immigration was the issue of national security. Representative Tom Duncan from California intimately linked the two when he said that “this border enforcement is no longer just an immigration issue. It’s a national security issue.”⁵ These sentiments were also echoed by President Bush, when he said on Fox News that “Illegal immigration is a serious challenge. And our responsibility is clear, we are going to protect the border.”⁶ Michael Scheuer, former CIA senior intelligence analyst, also furthered this rhetoric when he was quoted on CBS’ Evening News as saying “If we can’t stop illegal immigration, we certainly can’t stop a talented group of people bent on giving their lives to attack the United States.”⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ O’Reilly, Bill, November 8, 2005, “Impact.”

⁶ Hume, Brit, November 28, 2005, “Bush Pushes for Immigration Reform.”

⁷ Schieffer, Bob, January 19, 2006, “Evening News for January 19, 2006.”

Shifting the focus from immigration in the context of Latin America to the context of national security helps legitimate the need to take strong action on the issue. One might feel sympathy for the immigrant attempting to cross the border in order to provide a better life for his or her family, but the fear that alongside these kinds of immigrants might be international terrorists seeking to wreak havoc inside the United States trumps any response to the issue founded on the feeling of sympathy. However much U.S. citizens might feel that immigrants need help, this kind of rhetoric allows them to feel that they cannot be expected to provide this help at the expense of their own security.

Additionally, immigration was tied to violence and crime, as well as gang culture. In a report on National Public Radio, John Burnett pointed out that while the public simply sees poor immigrants coming to the U.S. to work, Homeland Security secretary Michael Chertoff has “acknowledged that violence and mayhem along the southwest border is escalating.”⁸ Chertoff then commented on the multiple criminal organizations operating along the border. News reports also linked immigration from Latin America to the existence of gangs in the U.S. In commenting on the denunciation of a program aimed at deporting gang members of undocumented status by some Latino groups, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement put out a statement saying that it “finds it ironic that special interest groups calling for justice would advocate turning a blind eye to lawbreakers who bring violence and misery to neighborhoods around the nation.”⁹

The same logic present within the national security rhetoric as also present within

⁸ Burnett, John, February 12, 2006, “Violence Surges Along U.S.-Mexico Border.”

⁹ Dobbs, Lou, December 20, 2005, “Illegal Alien Gang Controversy.”

this rhetoric. This time, however, the argument is made that immigrants themselves pose a threat to the safety of U.S. citizens. Perhaps not all immigrants are expected to commit violent crimes or participate in gang activity, but the implication that a disproportionate threat has arisen out of this community is made in order to justify its exclusion from society.

The threat of immigrants to U.S. culture was also presented as a problem facing the country. In a report by Lou Dobbs on CNN, Dobbs stated that “America, the world’s greatest melting pot, is struggling to maintain its identity” because of the increasing incidence of the Spanish language in U.S. culture – “the English language is under assault.”¹⁰ Later in Dobbs’ program, he noted that by taking “multicultural approaches and multilingual approaches, they are, in point of fact, penalizing the very people that they should be wanting to help to learn English” as “it’s been proven over and over again that language assimilation leads to economic assimilation.”¹¹ CNN also featured a story on how “the illegal alien crisis is weakening our country’s bedrock notion of one person, one vote” as “border states with large illegal alien populations will soon gain major political clout if nothing is done to stop a growing threat to our democratic system.”¹²

This rhetoric was aimed at appealing to people on the basis of a common identity that is being threatened by the presence of immigrants who refuse to assimilate into the dominant culture, by, for instance, continuing to speak Spanish rather than learn English. While this might be considered racist and xenophobic by some, framing the rhetoric as an

¹⁰ Dobbs, Lou, November 16, 2005, “Racism May Be Immigration Issue.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Dobbs, Lou, December 23, 2005, “Illegal Immigrants Affect Politics Despite Status.”

attempt to save the “melting pot” of the United States allows it to appear to be tolerant of the various cultures represented in the country while still maintaining that assimilation is essential to the identity that has been established together as a country.

While conservative news anchors like Lou Dobbs and Bill O’Reilly presented very negative views of immigrants, rhetoric from the anti-illegal immigrant groups using the “Minuteman” descriptor was even more unrestricted. In the “About Us” section on the official Minuteman Project webpage, the Project’s mission is described as being intricately linked to upholding the rule of law, as a necessary counterbalance to the “mobs of ILLEGAL aliens who endlessly stream across U.S. borders.”¹³ The group foresees the U.S. being “devoured and plundered by the menace of tens of millions of invading illegal aliens,” and believes that “future generations will inherit a tangle of rancorous, unassimilated, squabbling cultures with no common bond to hold them together, and a certain guarantee of the death of this nation as a harmonious ‘melting pot.’”¹⁴ This rhetoric once again serves to dehumanize immigrants and stress that they are a threat to U.S. culture, not because they are of a different race, but because of their refusal to assimilate.

On the website for the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, a branch off group from the original Minuteman organization, the “About Us” section suggests that activists are meant to be pulled in out of a desire to ensure this country’s “protection from people who wish to take advantage of a free society.”¹⁵ In the recruitment brochure put out by the

¹³ Minuteman Project, “About Us,” <<http://minutemanproject.com/mmp/?cat=19>>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, “About Us,” <<http://www.minutemanhq.com/hq/aboutus.php>>.

Defense Corps, the organization's mission is put forth as protecting the U.S. from "all those who jeopardize our national security, sovereignty, and prosperity through illegal immigration that today amounts to foreign invasion."¹⁶ The rhetoric stressed the injustice to U.S. citizens being committed by immigrants using resources of which they are undeserving, and breaking laws in the process.

Another organization vocal about the illegal immigration issue was Americans for Immigration Control (AIC). Founded in 1983, AIC supports ending immigration that exceeds "250,000 self-supporting immigrants per year,"¹⁷ as the group notes that

Currently, the annual tidal wave of over a million immigrants (legal and illegal) is endangering our American way of life. Currently, fewer than 15% of our immigrants come from Europe and share the heritage that made America strong. A majority of today's immigrants are (consciously or unconsciously) undermining our customs, our culture, our language, and our institutions. Instead of remaining in their native lands and emulating the United States, they are descending upon our shores and trying to reshape the United States into the image of the lands they forsook.¹⁸

In newsletters from 2003, AIC President Robert Goldsborough made several comments on the kinds of threats illegal immigrants pose to the United States. In talking about the ways in which drug trafficking is associated with this illegal immigration, he says

Another amnesty, especially of Mexicans, will no doubt further inflate the number and scope of Mexican drug traffickers geometrically and the criminal activity of users exponentially. American families can no longer afford or tolerate the continuous tidal waves of Mexicans which have spawned vast networks of Mexican drug traffickers. If we don't stop this insanity, our beloved country will

¹⁶ Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, "Brochure,"
<http://www.minutemanhq.com/pdf_files/minutemanbrochure.pdf>.

¹⁷ Americans for Immigration Control, 2007, "Solutions Supported by AIC,"
<<http://www.immigrationcontrol.com/solutions.htm>>.

¹⁸ Americans for Immigration Control, 2007, "A Brief History of Immigration,"
<http://www.immigrationcontrol.com/short_history.htm>.

be turned into the lawless society that is called Mexico.¹⁹

In an earlier newsletter, the same author attempted to make the point that “ethnic diversity causes disunity not strength.”²⁰ He points to the example of a Honduran immigrant that was shot in a misunderstanding that resulted from a language barrier between himself and a policeman. In speaking on this incident, Goldsborough says “The Perez incident emphasized the clash of cultures that occurs when immigrants refuse to learn English and instead demand that American culture be sacrificed on the altar of ‘political correctness.’”²¹ This rhetoric has by far the most explicitly racist overtones of any of the rhetoric discussed here. While the public may have been hesitant to embrace this kind of rhetoric, it nevertheless represents one of the voices influencing the climate of public discourse before the rallies.

An organization with a slightly more nuanced perspective on the illegal immigration issue was the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a national non-profit that was founded in 1979.²² FAIR lists its goals as follows: “to end illegal immigration through enforcement of existing immigration laws as well as the application of new technology” and “to set legal immigration at the lowest feasible levels consistent with the national security, economic, demographic, environmental, and socio-

¹⁹ Goldsborough, Robert H., 2003, “We’re In a Boat With a Big Hole In It...”
<<http://www.immigrationcontrol.com/archives.htm#aliendrugsmugglers>>.

²⁰ Goldsborough, Robert H., 2003, “A Solution to Avoid National Suicide,”
<<http://www.immigrationcontrol.com/archives.htm#aliendrugsmugglers>>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² FAIR, “About FAIR: Our Purpose,”
<http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_aboutmain>.

cultural interests of the present and the future.”²³ Rather than directly attacking immigrants, as is the strategy of many other similar groups, FAIR instead voices its frustration with the U.S. government for not taking appropriate action to control the immigration problem. In October of 2005, the organization issued a press release concerning the immigration debate in Congress, saying

No administration in history has been as disdainful of American workers as the one currently occupying the White House... We are certain to see a parade of Administration witnesses file up to Capitol Hill to argue that our economy depends on a constant infusion of low wage foreign labor, while insisting that Americans, who until fairly recently used to do these jobs, are either unwilling, unable, or unqualified to work in their own country.²⁴

The press release goes on to say that “The Administration has squandered valuable time and resources, as well as national security, pursuing its dream of endless cheap labor.”²⁵ While focusing its rhetoric on the government, FAIR nevertheless implicitly associates the immigrant population with a threat to national security and to the economic well-being of the country. By focusing on the role the government plays in this situation, the rhetoric avoids explicitly racist statements and provides another avenue through which citizens can take action; if they are not comfortable patrolling the border with the Minutemen, they may feel more comfortable addressing these issues with their Congressmen.

In piecing together a coherent frame from this rhetoric, there are three major elements to focus on: the economic threat, the security threat, and the cultural threat. As

²³ FAIR, “About FAIR: Our Principles,”

<http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_aboutlist49f3>.

²⁴ “FAIR: Administration’s Sham Proposals Continue to Misread Public Sentiment on Immigration,” October 17, 2005.

²⁵ Ibid.

detailed above, these three issues comprise the main arguments made against immigrants. These arguments held resonance to U.S. citizens because, as collective action frames should, they played on shared understandings of the world that are present within U.S. society. The economic arguments that made out the presence of immigrants as an injustice makes sense to those who believe in the logic of an individualistic society that sees providing for the welfare of others as a burden. In the arguments made about national security, the rhetoric capitalizes on the already wide-spread fear of terrorist attacks in order to make the need for national security a priority over and above concerns for immigrants' welfare. Central to the argument about culture is a sense of patriotism. Identifying the threats immigrants pose to U.S. culture reminds the audience that it must be aware of trying to preserve the character of the nation and what makes it great. It also helps to further the sense of identification U.S. citizens have with each other by emphasizing the ways in which immigrants cannot fit into that identity.

The overall frame is held together with the logic of nationalism: the interests of the nation must be upheld before the interests of outsiders can be considered. What the frame therefore constructs is a definition of "American" that excludes immigrants and binds U.S. citizens around a common "American" identity. Accordingly, the rhetoric serves to unite citizens around issues that are of general concern for the nation – economic well-being, national security, and cultural preservation – and to characterize the immigrant as a threat in each of these areas.

Chapter 3

As the immigration reform debate began heating up in the spring of 2006, there began to be an urgent need for the Latino community to put forth a message to the public that could counter the frame casting them outside the definition of “American” summarized in the last chapter. The possibility of new laws that would result in massive deportations and even more obstacles to immigration than before represented an injustice to the Latino community, but also an important political opportunity to affect the mindsets of the American people and their representatives in Congress. In cities across the country, rallies and marches were organized as a show of support for immigrants and for immigration reform that would be more favorable to their situation.

Our concern in this chapter will first be identifying how movement organizers chose to frame the message used to recruit support for the rallies and the message they desired to put forth during the rallies, then identifying what message protesters actually put forth during the rallies, and, lastly, what kind of commentary about the rallies was put forth by Latino voices in the media. The rhetoric of recruitment is a self-directed rhetoric that will be particularly important in understanding the basis of a Latino identity in the United States, as it directs us to the aspects of identity that were played upon to encourage participation in the movement. The rhetoric used during the rallies differs from the rhetoric of recruitment as its audience is no longer simply the Latino community, but also the wider American public. In speaking to multiple audiences, collective action frame literature tells us that the rhetorical message put forth here will reveal the outcome of a negotiated message that must mediate

between the concerns of the wider public and the Latino community, as dictated by either the expressive or instrumental needs of the movement.

The Rhetoric of Recruitment and Mobilization

It was upon passage of the infamous Sensenbrenner-King immigration reform bill in December of 2005 by the House of Representatives that activists across the country began to organize their response in the hopes of changing the outcome of legislation in Congress. In one of the earliest actions, a group of “unaffiliated volunteers” in Philadelphia came together to organize *El Paro*, a day without an immigrant, on February 14, 2006. Larger actions began to take place in March, April, and May, with the help of national organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens and the National Council of La Raza.

In the organization and advertisement of the rallies and days of action, the use of Spanish-language media, like radio and television, was essential. Many English-language newspapers voiced their surprise over the size and success of the rallies because the events were mainly publicized through these Spanish-language sources.¹ Considering the call to activism was often made in Spanish, it would seem that it was directed at the Latino community, but as the purpose of the rallies was to influence Congressional legislation, anyone wishing to call for alternate immigration reform may also have been attracted. In looking at the rhetoric of recruitment and mobilization, we will identify the sources of the dominant rhetoric and its substantive message in order to analyze the collective action frame that emerged in the context of these rallies.

¹ Starr, Alexandra, May 3, 2006, “Voice of America.”

To begin, we will examine the rhetoric put forth by the coalition that came together in January of 2006 to organize a “day without an immigrant” protest in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in February, as well as an April 10th rally that was part of a nationwide day of action.² Known as *El Paro*, the group identifies itself as “a group of individuals and institutions across the Philadelphia region... committed to comprehensive immigration reform being legislated and carried out justly across the United States.”³ At the February 14th action, one of the organizers of the movement, Ricardo Diaz, gave some insight into the formation of the *El Paro* group, saying

This movement started among the people. We don’t have any real institution. It all started on January 15th, when we began discussing measures to oppose H.R. 4437. We started to collect signatures, but we saw it wasn’t going anywhere. We realized 1,000 signatures from citizens were not worth much, but 10 signatures of employers had power.⁴

In one of *El Paro*’s internal documents, the internal dialogue that occurred at the group’s first meeting reveals that the group decided to take on a strategy of targeting U.S. citizens, specifically employers, in order to influence immigration policy. The mission of the movement was put forth as follows: “The intended action is directed towards the employers; they are the ones that can make the call, sign the petition, vote for a candidate. We seek to awaken them to their voting power and influence with legislators. We hope that through our

² El Paro, “About Us,”

<http://daywithoutanimmigrant.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=80&Itemid=52&lang=en>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lautz, Martin and Wolfson, Todd, February 15, 2006, “Video Interview w/ Ricardo Diaz Organizer of ‘A Day Without an Immigrant’ at Protest,” <<http://www.phillyimc.org/en/2006/02/19018.shtml>>.

actions they are willing to stand up for their own benefit--and ours.”⁵ The outcome of the meeting was to organize an action on February 14th that emphasized three essential steps: “be absent from work for the day; inform employers of the movement and request contact with legislators; and attend a designated event in Philadelphia or in your local area advocating positive immigration reform.”⁶

The group also drafted a “Proclamation for Responsible Immigration Reform” that emphasized the right of immigrants to participate in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as outlined by the Declaration of Independence.⁷ The document identified contemporary immigrants with those first immigrants to the Americas, saying “we, like the founders of this great nation and the countless generations of immigrants since, are drawn to the light of freedom and the opportunity to build a better life for our children.”⁸ The Proclamation then goes on to outline the contribution of immigrants to the economy: “we are not sojourners but active participants in the economy and we share in the building of the American Dream... our contributions are numerous and significant and far outweigh any emergency support and... the current labor needs of the United States tacitly encourage our presence while denying the many legal status and civil rights.”⁹ The Proclamation closes with a call for action by U.S. citizens: “we assert our right to be more than bystanders and beseech those with the privilege to participate in the political system to act on our behalf, themselves, and

⁵ El Paro, “What is the movement?”

<http://daywithoutanimmigrant.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11&Itemid=25&lang=en>.

⁶ El Paro, “Internal Documents: First coordinators meeting a success,”

<<http://www.daywithoutanimmigrant.com/docs/leadersmeetingasuccess.pdf>>.

⁷ El Paro, February 14, 2006, “Proclamation for Responsible Immigration Reform,”

<http://daywithoutanimmigrant.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=31&lang=en>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

for the benefit of the nation as a whole.”¹⁰

In this rhetoric, *El Paro* seems to have been responding directly to the characterization of the immigrant as an outsider, and as specifically un-“American” by using such symbols as the Declaration of Independence and the American Dream in its argument. *El Paro* makes the claim that immigrants are deserving of the chance to be in this country precisely because they do fit the definition of “American,” referring to their similarities with the first immigrants to the continent. The rhetoric also aims to counter the message that immigrants are a danger to the economy by pointing out that their contributions in this area make them productive members of society. The logic of nationalism reappears, as seen in the original frame, as *El Paro* plants itself into that framework by saying that its demands are meant to further the “benefit of the nation as a whole.” Thus, by reconstructing the understanding of “the immigrant,” *El Paro* fits its audience inside the definition of “American” and encourages immigrants to fight for the rights that should be accorded to them because of their status as such.

Another group that helped organize rallies and create the rhetorical message that would attempt to mobilize the Latino audience was the League of United Latin American Citizens. The national president of LULAC, Hector Flores, characterized the message they wanted to send through the demonstrations in the following statement:

We want to demonstrate the positive economic impact of the immigrant community... We think this is a matter of dollars and cents and that America needs to recognize the tremendous contributions of immigrants to our economy... We want to send a positive message and encourage individuals to show their pride

¹⁰ Ibid.

by bringing their American flags and wearing white shirts in a sign of peace...¹¹

Clearly, Flores wants to assuage fears about the immigrant threat to the economy and to U.S. culture that were described in Chapter 2. In this rhetoric, however, he is speaking to the potential protesters, encouraging them to believe in their own cause by emphasizing the contributions that they have made to the U.S. economy, and making a plea that they show their patriotism during the rallies. From this, we see that Flores must either recognize a tendency toward patriotism in his audience, or at least an audience that makes the connection between showing patriotism and receiving political rights. Otherwise, this kind of call would have no appeal to the cultural understandings of the targeted population.

Another website, endorsed by LULAC and dedicated to the April 9th march on Dallas, detailed the inspiration behind the event and what was expected of participants. One section of the site listed sample slogans that marchers might want to consider putting on signs for the rallies. The majority of these slogans were designed to send the message that immigrants are worthy of citizenship by emphasizing their contributions to society and negating negative stereotypes. Some suggested slogans included: “Not Meeting Your Military Recruitment Goals? We Are the Solution!” “We are Workers, Not Terrorists!” “Real Estate Boom Without Construction Workers?” and “All We Want is WORK!”¹²

These kinds of proclamations about immigrants’ value to society are reminiscent of the rhetoric described in Chapter 2 concerning the benefits of immigrant labor. Despite being put forth by the Latino community in this instance, the rhetoric nevertheless still serves to

¹¹ Olmos, Lizette Jenness, April 8, 2006, “Press Release: Mega march in Dallas Calling for Economic Boycott to Show Financial Impact of Hispanics on the U.S. Economy,” <<http://www.lulac.org/advocacy/press/2006/megamarch.html>>.

¹² MegaMarch, “Slogans,” <<http://www.megamarch.com/slogans.asp>>.

commodify the immigrant. While clearly directed at the general public, this kind of rhetoric is still influential in a potential activist's decision to participate in the movement or not. After seeing the kind of rhetoric presented by these slogans, the potential activist would have to ask him or herself if he or she wanted to be involved in putting forth this message. In other words, we see that the organizers believed that rhetoric "selling" immigrants, essentially as a commodity, would, on some level, appeal to their targeted audience.

The site also included a section entitled "Why We March?" which featured an opinion piece by Domingo Garcia, a lawyer and activist in Dallas, entitled "Marching for Liberty & Justice." Garcia noted that millions of people from all over the world have come to the United States: "They were not born here; they chose to come here... What these new American pioneers were seeking is really very simple. The right of every person to work as he or she wants to work, to have his or her children educated as every human being has a right to be educated, and to receive for his or her labor equitable and fair compensation."¹³

Here, Garcia seems to move beyond the rhetoric that serves to commodify immigrants, instead touching on some of the goals immigrants hope to achieve in this country – education and a more just economic situation. This rhetoric, similar to that seen from *El Paso*, attempts to connect the movement goals to the history of the United States, this time by using the phrase "new American pioneers" to describe new immigrants. This is another example of fitting the definition of immigrant into the understanding of "American" held by the mainstream public.

In another section, Garcia voiced support for the McCain-Kennedy bill put forth in

¹³ Garcia, Domingo, "Why We March?" <<http://www.megamarch.com/whywemarch.asp>>.

the Senate that included provisions for immigrants to earn legal residency and for a guest-worker program. He identified the goal of the march and the movement, saying that “We seek to enfranchise and make fully productive this currently excluded third-class community that must daily live hiding for fear of deportation. We seek a greater and equitable social justice for one of the nation’s hardest working communities.”¹⁴ He, like *El Paro*, emphasized that this march is about promoting American values and justice, citing the symbols of the Statue of Liberty, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights as examples of these values. His call for activism brought the piece to an end: “If you believe in a righteous America, you will join us in our March for Liberty & Justice...”¹⁵ In this way, Garcia was attempting to widen the understanding of what it meant to be “American” by emphasizing the role of the traditional “American” values of liberty and justice in the context of the immigrant situation.

Another piece of rhetoric used on the website was a poem written about the United States. The poem was entitled “America! America!” by Bertin Santibañez. After each stanza, Santibañez alternates using the lines “We are America” or “We love America.” He characterizes America as a land of opportunity, saying “We all here because we want a better life/ We all here because we want to be part of America/ We all want an opportunity to reach the sky.”¹⁶ He then emphasizes the positive traits of immigrants with various lines: “We all pay taxes in a daily basis,” “We all want to work and built america strong,” “We all are hard working people, not criminals,” and “We were raise with a strong religious values/ We love

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Santibañez, Bertin, “America Poem,” < <http://www.megamarch.com/mericapoem.asp>>.

our family and we love America.”¹⁷

This rhetoric clearly attempts to stir up patriotic feelings for the United States amongst its readers, connecting America with the opportunity for a better life, as well as justifying the presence of immigrants in the country by showing again how they fit into the definition of “American,” – as tax-payers, hard-workers, and religious people. The contention that immigrants are un-“American” can thus be seen as a false claim, and potential protesters are then mobilized to reveal the truth of the situation.

Lastly, in a Spanish-language interview with Garcia posted on the website, he explained the decision to call for the exclusive use of the United States flag, as opposed to welcoming all flags, saying “This is a struggle to turn immigrants into United States’ citizens and our message has to arrive in Washington D.C. before Congress. That’s why we need to send the message that we want to be Americans and that we will be able to follow the rules of this country. Because of that we are asking everyone that they carry U.S. flags.”¹⁸ When asked what message he wanted to send to the Latino community who might want to attend this march, he responded with three requests: to wear a white shirt that would signify peace, as this was to be a peaceful march, that U.S. flags be used, and that marchers respect all points of view of those who participate.¹⁹

The goals and strategy of Garcia and the other organizers of the march become very clear here. Garcia makes it explicit that the march is occurring for political reasons, and therefore needs to make a particular statement that will resonate with those holding political

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fitzsimmons, Clara, “Q&As,” <<http://www.megamarch.com/qandas.asp>>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

power. More than in any other section of the website, the call to patriotism and peaceful action is characterized here as a strategic technique, and not necessarily born out of a true sentiment of patriotism.

The rhetoric presented by both grassroots organizations like *El Paro* and well-established national organizations like LULAC, though discussed here based on their English sources, was characteristic of what was disseminated to the wider public audience in Spanish-language media, through, for example, radio programming. Popular Spanish-language DJs promoted attendance at rallies in various cities, including Chicago, Dallas, and Los Angeles.²⁰ The message these DJs put forth was not confined to promoting attendance, as they also encouraged certain behavior that would contribute to the substantive message put forth by the event. This rhetoric originated with the organizers of the rally but was widely accepted by those disseminating the information. The Chicago Tribune reported that in promoting attendance at the rallies, local Spanish-language radio DJ Rafael Pulido, known as “El Pistolero,” “urged rally participants to wear white as a symbol of peace.”²¹ He said everyone should carry U.S. flags, not Mexican, as a symbol of patriotism. And as he broadcast contact information for U.S. senators, he advised callers to protest “in a peaceful way with sweet words.”²² DJs in Los Angeles were also credited by The Daily News of Los Angeles for bringing out large crowds dressed in white and waving the U.S. flag at the March 25th rally.²³

In summary, potential activists were called to counter the characterization of

²⁰ Tucker, Ken, April 21, 2006, “Will Hispanic Radio’s United Front Pay Off?”

²¹ Avila, Oscar, March 10, 2006, “Shooting for a Big Turnout.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Uranga, Rachel, April 8, 2006, “Immigration Reform Makes Airways.”

themselves as a danger to society and a drain on resources by media coverage and the Sensenbrenner bill by professing that their desire to be in this country was born out of a desire to work and participate in the American Dream. Organizers chose to frame the call to action as emerging from the emotion of loyalty. While the characterization of immigrants as criminals was denounced as unjust, the U.S. was never portrayed as the enemy to be fought against; rather the U.S. was a friend to be praised. In order to make this connection, values that immigrants desire, like freedom and justice, were associated with the United States, and the various claims made against the immigrant community were countered using these same values.

Responding to the concerns over the growth of the Latino population and the disintegration of the traditional concept of U.S. cultural society, organizers aimed to assure the U.S. audience that accepting immigrants into society would not lead to the “Latinization” of U.S. culture. After tensions emerged around the waving of non-U.S. flags at the first wave of rallies, organizers mandated the exclusive waving of the U.S. flag at future marches, in order to avoid confrontation. This chance to be patriotic was also one way in which activists were encouraged to emphasize their love for the U.S. and thus their desire to assimilate. The assertion that the march was fighting for traditional “American” values emphasized the positive image and love that immigrants hold for the U.S. Organizers also sought to counteract the rhetoric of national security that called for closed borders by emphasizing that immigrants are here looking for opportunities and are not criminals. Additionally, they played upon the need by certain U.S. industries for immigrant labor by detailing the work ethic and desire of immigrants to pursue economic opportunities by doing even the

undesirable jobs of society such as military service and menial labor tasks.

By framing the issue in this way, potential activists were encouraged to view the U.S. audience as a friendly potential ally who could be persuaded to change policies once it came to recognize those aspects of Latino identity that would be beneficial to the country – a willingness to work, serve in the military, and contribute positive moral values to society. What is made clear in the internal document detailing the evolution of *El Paro*'s strategic plan is the feeling of powerlessness that resulted in this decision. The fact that undocumented immigrants do not have a political voice necessitates their dependence on those who do have a voice to effect political change. The portrayal of Latinos as workers and strong supporters of “American” values may thus be an attempt to strategically construct an identity for the political benefits it could accrue, more so than an attempt to play into the understanding of identity on a personal level. The literature on collective action frames tells us that both elements are likely to be present, however the extent to which this identity is internalized by Latinos apart from its political purpose is still ambiguous.

Rhetoric Presented at Rallies

Despite the dominant presence of the rhetoric described above used to mobilize the Latino audience, the actual rhetoric found at the demonstrations varied widely and illuminated internal disagreement over the choice of the message.

Elements of the rhetoric desired by LULAC were present at the April 10th protests in Los Angeles, such as a sign in the crowd saying “You might hate us, But you need

us,”²⁴ and the words of one speaker, who said, “You need your USA flag. You want your citizenship? Get your USA flag... Fifty stars, that’s what we need, represent! We need to represent today!”²⁵ In an interview with Mayra Garcia, a 20-year old present at this rally, she explained why she had decided to participate, saying: “We’re here peacefully, we’re all wearing our white tees. Some of us have our national flags which is kind of disrespectful, because you know what, we’re in the United States... If it wasn’t for the U.S. we wouldn’t be here...”²⁶ Also at the April 10th rally, the city’s mayor Antonio Villaraigosa gave a speech, saying that the movement spanned racial, ethnic, and religious lines, and that

To those who say America: love it or leave it, we say, America, I love you and I want you to be all that you’ve held yourself out to be. We say ‘America, we’re staying here because we work hard, we play by the rules.’ Thank you for honoring America in the best tradition of America – democratic, peaceful, together: United States and the Congress, listen to us... acknowledge our existence...²⁷

However, in an article highlighting the April 9th march on Dallas, the Dallas Morning News presented some activists’ opinions that ran counter to the message LULAC wanted to send. Roberto Calderon, a professor from the University of North Texas, said specifically that “This is the people’s march: This isn’t LULAC’s march,”²⁸ and thirteen year old Andrea Lira commented that “They treat us as though we don’t exist, as though we don’t have feelings... I carry the Mexican flag because I am standing up for them.”²⁹ Also, not all protesters shared LULAC’s concerns about confrontation over foreign flags. LULAC was

²⁴ Jauregui, Antony and Robbins, Clare, “United We Stand,”
<<http://youthradio.org/politics/immigrationindex.shtml>>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hume, Chris and Galindez, Scott, “The Immigrant Justice Movement Keeps Growing,”
<<http://www.truthout.org/multimedia.htm>>.

²⁸ Solis, Dianne, April 4, 2006, “Range of emotions waving with flags.”

²⁹ Ibid.

anticipating the reactions of U.S. citizen bystanders like Gregg Holmes in Dallas, who was angered by the presence of Mexican flags. Referring to the U.S. flag, he said: “This is your flag... Thanks to this flag you are free to protest. Not that flag.” Rather than agreeing with Holmes about the superiority of one country over another, however, one student responded to Holmes by shouting out “We’ve built everything.”³⁰

These comments represent the fact that elements of the Latino community recognize the injustices that have been committed against them by the United States and are not necessarily motivated to participate in the immigration rights movement because of strong feelings of patriotism. Instead, the comments by Lira and the anonymous student point to their sense that the rallies are a chance to stand up and be proud of a Latino heritage that does not need to reconcile itself with an “American” identity.

Despite the strong presence of U.S. flags and white t-shirts, later Los Angeles protests also featured flags of multiple nations and signs calling for a full amnesty. Nativio Lopez, the President of the Mexican-American Political Association, was interviewed on the streets, saying that the demand of the rally was for “full and unconditional amnesty.”³¹ In the following excerpts from a speech at the May 1st rally, a college student who herself held undocumented status addressed the crowd with self-affirming rhetoric that denounced cultural domination:

It has been a long, long journey... but I stand before you to tell any immigrant, any undocumented immigrant that if you want to make it, give it your all and you will be able to.... I have come to this day with the struggle of many... nobody is illegal, that is a concept made up by many to oppress others... we have been

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Deger, Allie and Galindez, Scott, “No Human Being Is Illegal,”
<<http://www.truthout.org/multimedia.htm>>

taught to be ashamed because we are immigrants, we have been taught to be ashamed that we are undocumented, and I stand before you today and say that is a lie. We are human, and no paper determines our humanity. We deserve the same rights, the same opportunities; we have the same dreams.³²

Another university student, Liliana Flores, created a banner for the same rally, saying “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us,” and “globalization + exploitation = migration” (See Appendix 2).³³ This kind of rhetoric emphasizes the injustices committed against the Latino community, and promotes a regeneration of pride in immigrants’ Latin American heritage rather than an “American” identity. To embrace this perspective, protesters had to be willing to demand their rights in a more confrontational manner, rather than simply appealing to politically powerful actors in an attempt to convince them that, as “Americans,” they should be considered worthy of these rights.

The Los Angeles Independent Media Center also featured an article on the indigenous perspective at the March 25th event in Los Angeles. The author challenged the characterization of the event as an “immigrant” protest, making the point that “the underlying assumption is that being White (European descent) and/or speaking in English (which curiously takes its namesake from a foreign land called England) means one is not an immigrant.”³⁴ He wrote that Mexicans and Central Americans have been defined as “immigrants” in order for them to be characterized as the other and as illegal, even though “the dangerous truth... is that the Los Angeles marchers didn't come through Ellis Island or some trans-oceanic continent: they are the Indigenous People of this continent.”³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Harris, Sara, “Protest in Los Angeles,” <<http://youthradio.org/politics/immigrationindex.shtml>>.

³⁴ Manuel, A., March 26, 2006, “The Great Los Angeles March Against Racism: An Indigenous Perspective,” <<http://la.indymedia.org/news/2006/03/151648.php?theme=default>>.

³⁵ Ibid.

Accompanying the article on the Independent Media website were pictures of activists holding signs with slogans in English and Spanish that read: “Stolen Continent since 1492,” “We are Indigenous! The Only Owners of this Continent!” and “ALL Europeans are Illegal” (See Appendix 2).³⁶ This kind of sentiment was echoed by activist Sophia Chakos-Leiby at the May 1st San Francisco rally, as she was quoted as saying, “I think HR4437 is hypocritical because if they want to kick out 'illegal' immigrants, then technically they have to kick out everyone who immigrated here from Western Europe during the 1600s, and their descendents.”³⁷

This rhetoric is a direct return to the kind of rhetoric seen in the Chicano movement of the 1960s discussed in Chapter 1, emphasizing a connectedness between the Latino community of the United States and the populations of Latin American countries. It is directly confrontational, going so far as to tell the politically powerful citizens of the United States that they are “illegal” themselves.

In the May 1st rally on New York, one anonymous protester made the point that while objecting to the H.R. 4437 bill, he was also opposed to the Senate version of the bill that made provisions for a guest-worker program: “Say no to guest worker! We don’t want legalized slaves!”³⁸ The same activist also said “it’s not about Mexican issues, it’s about anybody, about immigrants, about citizens, everybody should join in.”³⁹ At the protests, United States flags as well as flags from immigrants’ countries of origin were displayed, and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Tejada, Wilmer, “From the Field,” <<http://youthradio.org/politics/immigrationindex.shtml>>.

³⁸ Gelzer, Sari, “New York City: Mayday Immigration Protest and Boycott,” <<http://www.truthout.org/multimedia.htm>>.

³⁹ Ibid.

large puppets representing indigenous peoples were seen among the street protesters.⁴⁰

These seemingly new elements of rhetoric seen during the rallies that were not presented for recruitment purposes by mainstream groups framed the issue in a completely different way. Instead of portraying the United States as a friend and symbol of opportunity, protesters linked their current status with the historical atrocities committed by European colonizers, whose legacy has now been passed down to their descendents. Current U.S. policies were implicitly condemned by the protester with the sign that made the link between migration and the global economic system of globalization and exploitation. Some of the rhetoric was also aimed at denouncing the implied cultural domination of the United States over Latin America, such as the college student calling for liberation of the minds of the oppressed. The rhetoric was self-directed, losing the target audience of potential allies within the U.S. citizenry as it served to reinforce the fears of non-assimilation voiced by the mainstream U.S. public before the rallies. It took a cue from the Chicano movement of the 1960s in preferencing the expressive reasons for movement that could transform Latino consciousness and make the possibility of other frames, which do not define the struggle for rights as a political one dependent on the benevolence of fully enfranchised citizens, appealing.

These tactics, despite being present in a significant way at the rallies, were marginalized by organizers because they were not appropriate in reaching the instrumental goals of the movement, which were to influence legislation decisions that would be taking place in Washington. Since the rallies were organized in response to a political opportunity,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the logical audience that organizers chose to cater to was those who influence decision making processes. The U.S. general public was an obvious choice, as Representatives and Senators look to please their constituencies when voting on legislation. Thus, their vision of the struggle as a political one, in combination with their reality of political powerlessness, gave rise to the choice of frame and accompanying rhetoric used to mobilize the rallies. This could not stop, however, the presence of individuals with alternative frames from having a voice at the rallies as well.

Rhetoric Presented by Latino Voices in the Media during the Rallies

Various opinions were presented by Spanish-language newspaper editorialists, some in line with the frame presented by LULAC and some not. The variety of rhetoric presented emphasizes the internal disagreement within the Latino community concerning this issue, as seen in the discrepancy between the message organizers wanted to send at the rallies and the actual message that some protesters put forth.

In talking about the rallies, one anonymous editorialist recognized that “although it is not against the law to carry a Mexican flag, speak in Spanish, or demand that territory be returned to Mexico,” he or she characterized protesters that put forth this image as “the red flag that waves in front of the bull.”⁴¹ As the goal, put forth by Domingo Banda of San Antonio, Texas, was to “be heard so that the opportunity to stay legally in this country is given to us,” he believed the tactic most compatible with this was to convince U.S. citizens that the true intention of immigrants is simply to “work and study in order to improve the

⁴¹ “Una casa dividida no puede sobrevivir,” April 2, 2006.

lives of everyone in this country.”⁴² These two authors seem to embrace the rhetoric of assimilation, but only insofar as it is a tactic meant to gain greater benefits for the community.

Others, like Henry Flores, also from Texas, made it clear that this sentiment was not simply a tactic. In his editorial he explained his understanding about the contemporary global economy by saying that “today you need to break down barriers in order to allow workers in to this country in order to keep the wheels of industry turning and keep our economy healthy.”⁴³ He emphasized that it is unpatriotic to support immigration barriers because it is the immigrant laborers “doing the work that is necessary and American citizens don't or can't do” that make the U.S. stronger.⁴⁴

Many editorialists approached the issue in another way. For example, Henrik Reh binder of *La Opinión* in Los Angeles emphasized that the English language is not in danger, saying “In other countries the need to maintain a flexible language does not exist, but there is also no other nation in the world that enjoys the diversity that we do here. This characteristic, more than just making the United States rich, is a good policy that shouldn't be erased because of an ignorant and chauvinist demagogy.”⁴⁵ Los Angeles editorialist Ana Maria Salazar emphasized that all of the reasons put forth by the government, like controlling terrorist or drug traffickers, are just a “political game that uses smoke and mirrors to avoid the reality: the United States... is tired of so many Mexicans entering without asking

⁴² Banda, Domingo, April 2, 2006, “Una marcha por la libertad y la dignidad.”

⁴³ Flores, Henry, April 2, 2006, “Tío Político: ‘Immigration is as American as Apple Pie.’”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Reh binder, Henrik, May 20, 2006, “El idioma inglés no está en peligro.”

permission.”⁴⁶ An editorial by Ricardo Vela in San Diego attempted to join Latinos of all statuses, documented or undocumented, by asking them “I invite you to analyze your daily activities and observe carefully your surroundings and honestly answer the following question: Have I been a victim of discrimination? Maybe the immediate answer for the majority of us is a round, no! However... we have all, in some way or another, been “victims” of discrimination, whether subtle or strong.”⁴⁷ Writing from Miami, editorialist Daniel Morcate, stated that the United States actually owes undocumented immigrants legal recognition that gives them equality with the rest of U.S. citizens, since “the most influential country in the world has acquired a special responsibility toward other countries that it affects with its policy decisions, its economy programs, and its treatment of the environment.”⁴⁸ These authors presented a more confrontational perspective, denouncing what they saw as outright discrimination against Latin Americans and using stronger language to demand that the United States recognize its obligation to immigrants, rather than supporting the view that immigrants must prove themselves worthy of citizenship rights.

The English-language media also presented Latino voices in some of their coverage of the rallies. In an interview with ABC, Oscar Avila, activist and writer at the Chicago Tribune, made statements about the March 10th rally in Chicago after participating in it, saying that the participants were “a pretty broad coalition of groups, religious groups, labor unions, immigrant advocacy groups and much of their focus was on this proposal of this House Resolution 4437. But they were also promoting the broader cause of immigrant rights

⁴⁶ Salazar, Ana Maria, May 20, 2006, “La frontera real.”

⁴⁷ Vela, Ricardo, Feb 24-March 2, 2006, “Mi voz es su voz; ¡Y hablando de la inmigración!”

⁴⁸ Morcate, Daniel, March 30, 2006, “Nuestros Iguales.”

and integrating undocumented immigrants into society.”⁴⁹ He also said that immigrants are personally offended by their characterization as criminals, as “they view themselves as contributors to the economy, contributors to society.”⁵⁰ On the morning of the April 10th rally in New York, ABC aired a report on two moms, one an immigrant and labor activist and the other a member of “Mothers Against Illegal Aliens.” The immigrant mother was quoted as saying “If I had the opportunity to stay in my country, most likely I would be in my country. But if I was hoping for a better future for me and my children, I needed to look for something better. My country was not giving that to me.”⁵¹ She went on to comment that having her children learn both English and Spanish in schools was a positive thing, as languages are important and “my children will learn to know other people from other countries and other cultures.”⁵² After the May 1st “day without an immigrant,” one activist, Michael Herrera, said on ABC News, “it’s not a crime to be a working man, to want to provide for your family. It’s a great thing, it’s a great thing.”⁵³ When asked if he thought by boycotting that activists were “biting the hand that feeds,” he responded “well, it’s not even about that. Why does it have to be that, the hand that feeds you? Why can’t we all work together?”⁵⁴

These voices represent a slightly nuanced embrace of the assimilation frame. While they accept that they must integrate themselves into U.S. society, they emphasize that their desire to be in the United States is founded on their recognition of the economic opportunity

⁴⁹ Thomas, Pierre, March 10, 2006, “U.S.-Mexican Border Grew More Dangerous: Upsurge of Illegal Immigrants.”

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gibson, Charles, April 10, 2006, “Taking it to the Streets: Mom vs. Mom on Immigration.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sawyer, Diane, May 2, 2006, “Immigration Rally: One Million Immigrants Skip Work for Rally.”

⁵⁴ Ibid.

that this country provides. They did not explicitly profess their love for the U.S. however, and refused to acknowledge that they owed the country something in return for their rights; they recognized themselves as equals amongst other citizens.

The rhetoric presented by these Latino voices showcases a diversity of opinions and reveals that many are willing to use the rhetoric of assimilation as a strategic tool, but see past it in applying it on a personal level. For example, while Flores is clearly of the strong personal conviction that immigrants should be allowed into the country because of their willingness to work in menial jobs and support the economy, the activist Michael Herrera, while emphasizing his status as a working man, hesitated to accept the status of a second-class citizen – needing to be fed by the U.S. The anonymous editorialist from San Antonio was ambiguous over whether he saw any legitimacy in protesters’ cultural assertions of the Mexican flag and Spanish language, emphasizing instead his belief that this was a tactically flawed strategy. Other editorialists promoted a completely different frame in pointing out that the reality of the situation is that the U.S. does not want any more Mexicans, attempting to rally people around the experience of discrimination, and making the claim that these rights being asked for are really owed to immigrants by the United States.

This discussion of the rhetoric employed in mobilizing the rallies, and the rhetoric present during and after the rallies as well provides us with at least two different collective action frames employed by activists, with the more confrontational and anti-assimilation frame being marginalized by the frame attempting to fit the immigrant community into the definition of “American” that was put forth as the original frame, described in Chapter 2. We will return to this rhetoric for analysis in Chapter 5, but first, in Chapter 4, we will discuss

the way in which the mainstream media and other organizations chose to respond to the rhetorical message presented during the rallies.

Chapter 4

As we have seen, the dominant rhetoric presented at the immigration rallies was in many ways an attempt to counter the negative characterization of immigrants as put forth to the public through the media and by anti-illegal immigrant organizations. These rallies captured the attention of the nation, receiving large amounts of press around the country. As their purpose was to influence the Congressional decisions on immigration reform legislature, the struggle did not come to an end with these marches: the debate over reform has still not been resolved and has already been witness to one round of mid-term Congressional elections as of April 2007. This continuing political opportunity has left room for more framing dialogue to occur between the two opposing camps in this debate. Those opposing the kind of reform called for in the rallies had the chance to respond to the way these rallies were framed with their own counter-rhetoric. Looking again to media sources to help identify this rhetoric, we explore in this chapter the rhetorical responses put forth in the wake of the rallies.

The most dominant strategy used to counter the frame put forth by those at the rallies was to emphasize the necessity of the rule of law when considering the immigration issue. To counter the protesters' cry that the United States has always been a nation of immigrants, and that immigrants come with a strong desire to participate in the American dream is difficult, as there is truth in this argument, as well as strong emotional appeal. By choosing to emphasize the uncontested fact that undocumented immigrants

are breaking the law, the frame gathers people around the idea that this phenomenon is a threat to the secure order of U.S. society.

Conservative Fox News host Sean Hannity made sure to empathize with the immigrant community in a conversation with author Juan Hernandez, while at the same time making it clear that the issue was not one that could be understood on an emotional level, saying

I'm the product of immigration. I love immigrants. I want people to participate... I know why people want to be here. We have open arms for wherever you come from. We want you to respect our national security concerns, our borders, and our sovereignty. Vicente Fox does not respect them, because he won't even acknowledge there is an illegal immigration problem... What is so unreasonable? Don't we have the right to control our borders? Don't we have an obligation to do so, Juan? Certainly, you understand that.¹

The following exchange between Hannity and Hernandez also clearly illustrates

Hannity's attempt to keep a strong distinction between the nature of immigrants and their actions:

Hernandez: But we don't need to protect our borders from these wonderful people that were marching yesterday.

Hannity: But if they can come in illegally...

Hernandez: These are the kinds of people that we need in this country today.

Hannity: ...so can the enemies of America. You have got to see that.

Hernandez: Oh, my friend, have a heart. These are wonderful people...

Hannity: I have a heart.

Hernandez: ...that have been working here of this nation...

Hannity: Just do it legally.

Hernandez: ...giving us the lifestyle...

Hannity: Come on in legally.

Hernandez: ...that we have.

Hannity: Legal.²

¹ Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes, May 2, 2006, "Interview with Author Juan Hernandez."

² Ibid.

Representative Tom Tancredo, a Republican from Colorado, also stressed that the issue was one to be considered as threatening the rule of law. He was quoted on CNN News, in response to the requests made by protesters for a path through which illegal immigrants may seek citizenship, as saying “It sends a horrible message. It sends a terrible message to every single person who has ever come in this country the right way.”³ Some U.S. Hispanics voiced their agreement with this statement by forming a new organization in response to the rallies. In stating the rationale behind their principles, they state on their website:

We are Americans of Hispanic heritage who believe in America. We believe in the governmental institutions and laws that make this country the greatest in the world. It is because of this strong belief in the principles of freedom, individual liberties, the rule of law, and democracy that we formed *You Don't Speak for Me!*: American Hispanic Voices Speaking Out Against Illegal Immigration.⁴

Hand in hand with this counter-frame was the emphasis placed on the security concerns of the United States. For example, on May 17th of 2006, Hannah Storm on CBS mentioned the pro-immigration rallies occurring in Washington D.C. that day during the Early Show news briefs, and then immediately linked the issue to national security:

Hannah Storm: For the second time in two months, there will be pro-immigration rallies in Washington today. The president is taking heat for his plan to deploy the National Guard along the Mexican border. But at 7:18 this morning, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist told Rene that securing the nation's borders is critical.

Senator Bill Frist: It is a national security issue when you have over a million people coming across these borders each year illegally, thousands of people running across those borders every day.⁵

³ O'Brian, Miles, April 10, 2006, “Immigration Nation; Life or Death for Moussaoui?”

⁴ You Don't Speak For Me, “Our Principles,” <<http://www.dontspeakforme.org/principles.html>>.

⁵ Storm, Hannah, May 17, 2006, “Newscast: More pro-immigration rallies planned.”

On a Fox News broadcast on May 1st, 2006, the president of the organization We Need a Fence, which advocates for the building of a fence along the Mexican-U.S. border, was interviewed. He put forth the opinion that

I think what it comes down to, John, is that as people work their way through this very complex issue, they recognize that you cannot reform immigration until you can control it. You cannot control it until you can secure the borders, and you cannot secure the borders unless you have either a physical barrier or manpower alone. And you just can't get there with manpower alone.⁶

The website for the We Need a Fence group put forth the current problem of immigration in the following way:

The problem is not merely the number of illegal immigrants. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants from Central and South America, there are several hundreds, perhaps thousands, of illegal aliens from countries that sponsor terrorism or harbor terrorists entering the United States each year across our border with Mexico. Thus, it is a national security issue as well as an immigration issue.⁷

In this way, any message put forth by the rallies was immediately countered by the overwhelming concern for the safety of U.S. citizens.

Commentators desiring strict immigration reform also expressed a kind of outrage at the rallies and any displays of cultural pride that that did not imply gratitude for immigrants' situation in the United States. Despite protesters' attempts to profess their patriotism and desire to assimilate and contribute positively to the economy and to American life, the counter-rhetoric served to pinpoint evidence that immigrants do not in fact contribute in a positive way to society. The rhetoric emphasized the drain on

⁶ Gibson, John, May 1, 2006, "My Word; Interview with Colin Hanna."

⁷ We Need a Fence, 2005, "The Problem," <<http://www.weneedafence.com>>.

resources that immigrants represent to the American public, thus making them appear ungrateful and irrational in their demand for rights.

Pat Buchanan, a conservative political analyst for MSNBC, was involved in a discussion of the rallies on NBC News, where he attempted to make it clear who the protesters were and what their position in society is: “I think the impact politically will be a tremendous backlash among the American people. These aren’t immigrants we’re talking about Matt. We’re talking about illegal aliens. Twelve million of them in the United States who are engaged in a massive act of extortion to demand the full benefits of citizenship and citizenship itself.”⁸ John Gibson, a commentator for Fox News, also put forth a similar opinion in discussing the issue, making it clear that the rights being asked for by protesters were not rational demands:

Why do I get the feeling from demonstrations today that the unspoken message is we do not have the right to control our borders? Instead I’m getting the feeling the protesters are saying we have an obligation to leave the borders open as if the rights issue here were simply the rights of immigrants to enter the United States and to make money. I’m for immigrants coming to the country. I recognize that is our history. But I don’t think we have to just leave the light on and then leave the door open. I notice that when I go to other countries they sniff me over pretty good. So how come people coming here from Mexico and points south have a right to come in where there isn’t a customs office open and doing business? And once they are here, how come they have a right to stay and take for themselves all the rights and privileges and entitlements that Americans give themselves through the actions of their elected representatives?⁹

In an article published by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) about the rallies, the group also ridiculed the idea that protesters were deserving of the rights they were marching for:

⁸ Lauer, Matt, May 1, 2006, “Profile: Immigrants asked to demonstrate their economic presence by boycotting today; Presidential adviser Pat Buchanan discusses illegal immigrants.”

⁹ Gibson, John, May 1, 2006, “My Word; Interview with Colin Hanna.”

Marchers from coast to coast paraded through the streets of American cities carrying Mexican and other Latin American flags, demanding an assortment of “rights,” including full U.S. citizenship. Noticeably absent from most of the early illegal alien protest rallies were American flags, and when they were evident, they were often carried upside down — a symbol of disrespect. Many protesters carried signs in Spanish and English proclaiming their “rights” to be in this country and enjoy all the benefits of America, while others declared the United States itself is stolen land that they are reclaiming. ... While the size of the illegal alien rallies was impressive, they served to galvanize public opinion in opposition to amnesty, as law-abiding Americans were offended by the sight of illegal aliens demanding rights in the U.S. while waving foreign flags.¹⁰

The article went on to stress what FAIR considered the inherent message of the rallies — a non-desire to assimilate: “The sight of millions of illegal immigrants and U.S.-born citizen children marching under Mexican flags and asserting their identities as something other than American is very troubling and should be seen as a wake-up call to the political leadership of this country.”¹¹ In a similar vein, Mark Krikoian of the Center for Immigration Studies think tank was quoted on NBC Nightly News in response to the translation and singing of the U.S. national anthem in Spanish during the rallies, saying it represented “a heck of a way for strangers who broke our laws to ask for forgiveness.”¹² These kinds of comments framed the discussion in a way that serves to remind the public that the U.S. is in essence doing a favor for immigrants, and that the response from protesters should be viewed in this light — any message or symbol that does not acknowledge the generosity of the United States, the immigrants’ subordinate status, and their obligation to seek the goodwill of the country is a reason for outrage.

¹⁰ Federation for American Immigration Reform, 2006, “Millions of Illegal Aliens Take to the Streets Demanding “Rights” and Amnesty While the Government Refuses to Act,”
<http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_may06nl02>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Williams, Brian, April 28, 2006, “Newscast: Spanish version of national anthem sparks debate.”

Another attempt to counteract the rhetoric put forth in the rallies was to marginalize the protesters as a group causing divide both within the Latino community and in the wider American public. In a broadcast on NBC News covering the May 1st rallies, the phrase “America Divided” appeared several times on the screen.¹³ In this broadcast, Pat Buchanan spoke on the ineffectiveness of the Congress because of the divide, and the need for unity: “If the Congress of the United States will not pass a bill to enforce the laws of the country and secure the borders, we don’t need a Republican Congress any more, we don’t need a Democratic Congress, we need a new American Congress in this country.”¹⁴ This statement by Buchanan also implied that a truly “American” solution to the problem would be a strict response focused on security concerns and the rule of law. On the ABC coverage of the same rallies, host Stephanie Sy commented that while she noticed a lot of pride amongst protesters,

I do think that it’s important to say that most of the people that were at this rally do favor full amnesty for undocumented workers when, in fact, there are a lot of legal immigrants that don’t agree with that position and would like to find some sort of compromise position. So, they don’t speak with one voice, but they did show a lot of unity at this rally...¹⁵

The organization mentioned earlier, You Don’t Speak For Me, composed of U.S. citizens of Hispanic ancestry who were not in agreement with the demands of the protesters, is evidence of this split. By emphasizing these types of splits, the desire of the protesters to show their unity with U.S. society was countered, as the

¹³ Lauer, Matt, May 1, 2006, “Profile: Immigrants asked to demonstrate their economic presence by boycotting today; Presidential adviser Pat Buchanan discusses illegal immigrants.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Potter, Ned, May 1, 2006, “ABC News Now/Inside the Newsroom #2.”

characterization of the rallies became one of division. It also served to de-legitimize the message sent by protesters, presenting it as one only supported by a particular group within society, thus more easily considered a message that can be ignored.

The counter-rhetoric put forth in response to the rallies could perhaps best be summed up by the five basic principles put forth by the You Don't Speak For Me group: all immigration should be legal; illegal aliens from any country should never be rewarded with benefits or privileges; no amnesty – no way; secure our borders now and fully enforce immigration law; learn and speak English.¹⁶ Instead of focusing on the same negative characterizations that were often presented in the media before the rallies took place, such as immigrants as violent, as drug-traffickers, and as gang members, the rhetoric was much more concerned with emphasizing that despite the positive benefits protesters are claiming immigrants bring to society, they are nonetheless breaking the law and must pay those consequences, as well as admit they thus do not deserve the rights they are asking for. Nevertheless, the rhetoric still served to emphasize a particular understanding of “American,” and to emphasize that immigrants do not fit in; instead, they are aliens, strangers, illegal, and must be considered a threat. This argument was aimed, as the rallies were, at influencing voters' opinions; several commentators made the statement that they believed the American public would see the protesters' claims as outrageous when considering the truth of the situation as they presented it. This new rhetoric presents a new challenge to protesters, and will contribute to the formation of new frames as the protesters

¹⁶ You Don't Speak For Me, “Our Principles,” <<http://www.dontspeakforme.org/principles.html>>.

must respond to the counter-rhetoric in order to continue influencing public opinion on the issue.

Chapter 5

After identifying the rhetoric that has been used to frame the immigration debate in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, we emerge with a clear picture of how the rallies were organized in response to a political opportunity and were shaped both as a result of the dominant rhetoric presented in the media before the rallies began as well as the material situation of powerlessness that protesters were confronted with. Now, we are in a position to analyze the roots of this rhetoric and consider the implications for Latino identity as a result of the collective action frame employed, as well as to evaluate the movement's ability to effect change within society.

Looking back to the review of collective action frames in Chapter 1, we are reminded that the goals and strategic considerations of the organizers make up only part of what goes into creating a frame. Organizers must also hope to address the "cultural understandings of the people they wish to appeal to" (Tarrow 1998, 109), as well as arrive at "shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (Esacove 2004, 71). Thus, in analyzing the frames we have identified, we can draw some conclusions about what kind of cultural understandings were present both within the general U.S. public and the Latino and immigrant community before the rallies, as well as what kind of shared understandings of the world and of themselves that the rhetoric was able to both play into and establish.

To begin, we will look into some of the underlying rationale behind the kind of rhetoric characterizing immigrants that was dominant before the rallies. Why would

rhetoric that oftentimes appeared racist and xenophobic appeal to a U.S. audience?

Despite the history of the United States as an immigrant nation, and the appeal of the oft-quoted Statue of Liberty – “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore” – there nevertheless seems to be an aversion to accept immigrants into the U.S. Part of the reason that members of the U.S. audience can be mobilized under a nationalist identity that is built around excluding others from full participation in their country is found in exploring the U.S. concept of citizenship.

In a note for the Harvard Law Review on “The Functionality of Citizenship,” the author explains the two aspects that make up the particular concept of citizenship held in the United States. The first aspect is functional, and can be seen as the nature of the “legal relationship between the individual and the United States” (The Functionality of Citizenship 1997, 1814). The second can be termed nationality, and can be described as “a sense of cultural identity and community that pervades all members of the nation” (The Functionality of Citizenship 1997, 1814). In the U.S., these two aspects are combined into one status “because of the judgment that, although all human beings are entitled to basic rights of process and fair treatment, only people who have demonstrated an ‘affective’ (horizontal) tie to the ‘nation’ should claim the (vertical) rights and duties of the ‘state’” (The Functionality of Citizenship 1997, 1815). If immigrants desire to gain the functional rights and privileges of being a citizen, it is thus widely recognized that they must also assimilate into the dominant culture of the United States. The presence of this logic was clearly witnessed in the baseline rhetoric regarding

immigration that attempted to construct a definition of “American” and emphasize how Latino immigrants did not fit into this definition.

As we saw in Chapter 1, during the era leading up to the Chicano movement assimilating into the dominant culture meant proving one’s whiteness, masculinity, and dedication to military service. Today, it is not clear that these expectations have changed significantly. To illustrate how this plays out for the contemporary Latino community, we will explore how the aspect of whiteness, traditionally associated with the dominant culture, is viewed today.

According to a Pew Center report conducted in 2004, Latinos consider whiteness “an important measure of belonging, stature, and acceptance” (Tafoya 2004, 1). The statistics on education, unemployment, and income indicate that those Latinos who identified themselves as white were more likely to have graduated from high school, be employed, and have a higher salary. The data also showed that U.S. citizenship and racial identification are associated, in that within immigrant groups from the same country, those who had become citizens identified themselves more often as “white” in the national census than those who had not. Additionally, each generation further removed from the original immigrant population also tended to identify themselves more often as “white.” It is clear that immigrant groups’ perceptions of their racial identity are shaped in part by their association of whiteness with citizenship and economic and social success. Though the relationship is undoubtedly more complicated than this, the survey nevertheless supports the persistence of the notion of citizenship discussed above. Being viewed as “white,” or part of the dominant culture, leads to greater inclusion and social

acceptance, and helps fulfill the nationality aspect of citizenship. Once this is fulfilled, the functional benefits and legal status as a citizen are then expected to follow (Tafoya 2004, 1-2).

With this understanding of citizenship, the rhetoric put forth before the rallies is more understandable. The public is indeed hesitant to accept immigrants as citizens until they have assimilated into the dominant culture, thus resulting in the rhetoric that attempted to characterize immigrants as “not American.” Whatever form this ideal “American” might take, the presence of an ideal implies a coercive understanding of citizenship and identity that influenced the situation of struggle that the Latino and immigrant community were forced to confront. Should the concept of citizenship in the United States today be one inclusive of all backgrounds, the immigrant struggle would not be one clamoring for assimilation into the dominant representation of a good “American” citizen. The message sent by protesters can thus be understood as a response to the political situation, as well as an appeal to the already formed identities and understandings of identity – which recognize assimilation as a necessary step to gain political rights – held by Latinos and immigrants.

Although this dominant rhetoric of assimilation, with its target audience of U.S. citizens, is one tactical option for achieving the desired material end goal of the benefits of citizenship through legal means, it begs the question of how much protesters either previously identified with this identity, or came to identify with it. Based on the discussion of the association by Latinos of whiteness with citizenship, to some extent we know that Latino identity already reflected this relationship. To what extent this rhetoric,

despite not being directed at Latinos, perpetuated how this group of people understood its identity, is not clear. Though marginalized in the mainstream media, the presence of rhetoric at the rallies that was in fact self-affirming and anti-assimilation makes the answer to this question even more ambiguous, but nevertheless lends some insight into these questions. The example of the self-directed rhetoric of the Chicano movement in the 1960s is also important to return to here, as it provides a historical example of the consequences that the rhetoric of assimilation can have on identity.

Self-directed rhetoric in the context of Latino social movements does not serve to further the instrumental goal of achieving political support amongst U.S. citizens, but does, however, serve to recognize the oppression Latinos face in the United States and to help affirm the inherent dignity contained within an identity that has traditionally been characterized as inferior. Had organizers attempted to employ this kind of frame, they would have been assuming there was a shared understanding amongst their potential participant base that recognized that the need to assimilate in order to gain the benefits of citizenship was unjust, and that was not willing to compromise its own culture and heritage for these rights. It is not clear that this was the case.

Looking back to Chapter 3, we see an example of self-directed rhetoric in the speech by a college student at a Los Angeles rally in 2006. She stated,

We have been taught to be ashamed because we are immigrants, we have been taught to be ashamed that we are undocumented, and I stand before you today and say that is a lie. We are human, and no paper determines our humanity. We deserve the same rights, the same opportunities; we have the same dreams.¹

¹ Deger, Allie and Galindez, Scott, "No Human Being Is Illegal," <http://www.truthout.org/multimedia.htm>.

This college student points to the fact that being characterized as “illegal” for so long has affected undocumented immigrants’ conceptions of themselves, making them ashamed of who they are. Given this state of oppression, it is logical to assume that not everyone would realize, as she does, that this characterization as “illegal” is an unjust situation that should not be tolerated anymore. It would thus indeed make sense for the rhetoric of assimilation put forth by movement organizers to appeal to the understandings of many immigrants about their own identities.

While the student was referring to the characterization of immigrants by the dominant U.S. population, it is essential to consider the impact the Latino community itself can have on its own identity. The rhetoric of assimilation put forth by movement organizers that served to commodify and dehumanize immigrants leads to the same oppression of consciousness caused by the original rhetoric from the mainstream public. It is important here to bring in lessons from past experiences with this kind of radical rhetoric. As outlined in Chapter 1, the Chicano movement of the 1960s preferenced precisely the kind of self-directed rhetoric witnessed above, rejecting traditional frames promoting assimilation that had previously been used to campaign for political rights. Refusing to cater to the kinds of character traits desired by U.S. society, such as whiteness and patriotism as displayed by military service, the organizers of the Chicano movement attempted to transform the consciousness of the Chicano community such that it would recognize its oppression was the result of “Anglo-American racism, exploitation, and oppression” (Oropeza 2003, 216), rather than of any fault of its own. Without explicitly recognizing this fact, the rhetoric of assimilation, despite serving a valuable

political purpose, was complicit in the domination over and oppression of a Latino or Chicano identity.

Connecting this radical understanding of the role of rhetoric to the contemporary message being put forth on behalf of the immigrant Latino community, it is clear that the dominant rhetoric of the rallies does not serve to liberate the consciousness of the community from the traditional oppression it has encountered from the voices presented in the mainstream media, but instead perpetuates an identity of inferiority. Linking an immigrant's worth solely to his or her economic contribution or ability to help reach military recruitment strategies ignores the intrinsic dignity of the person and the contributions that immigrants make to society through both their culture and their individuality, dehumanizing them in the same way the mainstream media did. Should any of the immigrants or Latinos who heard and identified themselves as being the subject of this rhetoric have internalized the message, they would believe that they were good for nothing more than working and serving the needs of the United States that most U.S. citizens cannot stoop to fulfill, that the values of the United States are desirable and superior to those of their own countries, and that in comparison with the benefits of U.S. citizenship, their culture and language are not worth preserving.

As this investigation did not utilize interviews or other means of inquiry to enter into the minds of the organizers of the rally, it cannot be clear whether the message used was meant to serve a purely political purpose, or whether it was a genuine attempt at forming an identity around the characterizations put forth in the rhetoric. Collective action theory would tell us, however, that both of these considerations are necessary to

construct an effective frame. The effectiveness can be seen in the huge numbers of supporters mobilized to participate in the rallies, although the actual impact of this rhetoric on the identity of Latinos and immigrants was not investigated in this study. Those hearing the message may very well have believed the message was meant to serve a purely political purpose, though it is unlikely that this distinction was explicitly made, especially considering the evidence that these ideas of assimilation already formed part of the Latino identity before the rallies. Regardless of the results a study on this impact, however, it is critical to recognize that this oppressive understanding of a Latino identity serves to perpetuate the power relations existing between Latin America and the United States, as well as the coercive understanding of citizenship that is dominant in the U.S.

It is here that this collective action frame encounters its limits in effecting social change. While the movement may achieve its goal of influencing political opinion and thus effect the desirable legislation reform, the question remains: at what cost to the community? Should a strategy that jeopardizes the dignity of the community be pursued? Despite political change, the oppression of the Latino consciousness will continue if the members of this community are continually characterized as inferior and only deserving of rights once their own heritage has been rejected. As discussed in Chapter 1, this situation of oppression has existed in the Americas ever since its colonization by European forces and has, in part, resulted in the great economic disparity existing between the United States and Latin America.

Without addressing this fundamental relationship of oppression, social movements cannot hope to address the roots of the problem, despite the political

implications of this kind of perspective. While the injustices suffered by immigrants must be addressed, the need for immigration in the first place will never be eradicated as long as the United States is praised and glorified for the economic opportunities it presents without questioning how this wealth is related to the poverty and lack of opportunity in immigrants' native countries. A frame that aimed to organize in response to this fundamental inequality in power relations would have been more suitable in addressing the root of the injustices of which the message of the rallies only exposed the tip.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that the threat of the Sensenbrenner-King bill loomed large for the immigrant community. The repercussions should this bill have been adopted would have been devastating. While self-directed, affirming rhetoric was certainly an option available, the consequences of using this kind of rhetoric, seen as more confrontational by the general U.S. public, would have been counter-productive in attempting to stop the passage of the bill into law. The original frame put forth by the mainstream media and activist groups that played on the understanding of what an "American" is and what kinds of rights this results in forced the organizers of the movement to make a difficult decision: they could either choose to play into this frame by fitting the understanding of the immigrants in question into this definition of "American," or present a more confrontational frame that would challenge the definition of "American" itself and allow the immigrant identity, rooted in a Latin American heritage, to remain strong. In the end, the goals of the movement to influence Congress over the passage of the bill won out, for organizers, over the desire to be true to their heritage and stand in solidarity with the people of Latin America. What we are left with is

the question of to what extent the organizers message was able to affect the consciousness, for better or worse, of their audience.

Chapter 6

At the outset of this study, we identified the goals of the project as threefold: reaching an understanding of why the collective action frame decided upon by the organizers of the immigration rights protests centered on assimilation, identifying what kind of limitations their frame might encounter in effecting societal change and what alternatives they had available to them, and exploring the consequences of their chosen frame for Latino identity. In this last chapter, we will summarize our findings in these three areas as well as take a look at the future of the immigration rights movement.

The influences that led movement organizers to choose a collective action frame that emphasized immigrants' patriotism and desire to be ideal American citizens were various and interconnected. First, organizers chose to mobilize the Latino community for the instrumental purpose of influencing legislation debates occurring in Congress. Precisely because of their undocumented status in the United States, the primary audience for this movement does not directly hold any voting power with which it can influence Congress. Rather than rely on the rest of the voting population already sympathetic to their cause, movement organizers felt that to effect legislative change they would need to reach the larger and thus more powerful mainstream voting population. As a result, the movement organizers set out with the more expressive goal of changing the opinions of these voters, which required them to respond to the negative rhetoric characterizing immigrants in the mainstream media.

As described in Chapter 2, this rhetoric served to unite its listeners around a

common “American” identity that excluded immigrants because of the economic, security, and cultural threat they pose to the “American” way of life. Immigrants’ value was seen to stem solely from their willingness to do menial labor, their status as illegal was seen to be in direct contradiction with the rule of law and served to remind citizens of the ever-present terrorist threat in the wake of 9/11, and their language and cultural traditions were described as too strong to mix into the melting pot that the United States is founded on. Since the mainstream immigration frame defined these issues as ones intrinsic to the well-being of the nation and characterized immigrants as both outside this national identity as well as a threat to this identity, organizers attempting to rally around immigrant rights were forced to respond to this contention that immigrants cannot be considered “Americans.” They thus chose the frame of assimilation as a means to show the general public that immigrants are indeed the same kinds of people as other U.S. citizens – hard-working, patriotic, law-abiding, and believers in the values of freedom and in the American Dream.

Additionally, movement organizers must have chosen this frame in part because they knew it held appeal for their potential audience. While it is clear that collective actions frames evolve in relation and response to each other, they must also be able to resonate with the audience they are attempting to mobilize. The willingness of the Latino audience to profess a desire to assimilate, though it may have been motivated in part out of strategic political considerations, is also born out of the identity and cultural understandings they held prior to when the movements began. As a result of the power relations and the situation of economic disparity existing between the United States and

Latin America, as well as the marginalized and relatively powerless situation experienced by Latinos in the U.S. domestically, members of immigrant communities may easily have developed the kind of oppressed consciousness that believes in the superiority of another group of people, in this case, United States citizens. Assimilation is often genuinely embraced by immigrants because they believe that the society and heritage they have left behind is indeed inferior to that of the U.S. Thus, the assimilation frame was also chosen in part by movement organizers because they knew that it could resonate with their audience.

We have thus identified the main reasons why movement organizers chose a collective action frame revolving around assimilation – it resonated with their goal of effecting political change by influencing voters, and it held appeal for the identity of its potential audience. Our findings in this area also led to some insight into the limitations that this frame encounters in effecting societal change, and as to why other potential frames were rejected.

While movement organizers were solely concerned with influencing the current Congressional legislation affecting immigration reform, these reform measures only scrape the surface of the larger problems that result in the phenomenon of migration in the first place. The situation of poverty and lack of economic opportunity in Latin America, resulting in large part from the historical legacy of colonization and the perpetuation of these inequalities by trade policies today, are not addressed by the kinds of legislation being considered in Congress. If the Latino population wishes for these issues to be taken into consideration, they must make a strong effort to connect their

struggle in the U.S. with the struggle of their home countries. While the rhetoric of assimilation may help achieve victories for immigrants domestically in the United States, it actually works against the larger struggle to gain justice internationally as it sidelines these issues in favor of talk of patriotism and the United States' national interest. By choosing to work within this frame, movement organizers inherently limited the scope of their movement and the grievances they could address; issues of international social justice cannot be addressed using the rhetoric of assimilation.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 5, the kind of self-directed rhetoric seen in the Chicano movement of the 1960s was another alternative available to movement organizers that would have been consistent with addressing injustices both domestically and internationally. This rhetoric centers on the idea that before positive change can truly occur, oppressed peoples must be liberated from their own ideas of inferiority and recognize themselves as equals with their oppressors. If immigrants always choose to sell themselves as cheap labor and cannon fodder, they will inevitably remain in these positions, and believe themselves to be worthy only of these positions. On the other hand, standing up and demanding to be recognized as human beings regardless of their country of origin, while it may not immediately result in tangible rewards, will nevertheless be a liberating experience. This self-directed affirming rhetoric, while not useful in relation to the particular goals of movement organizers, helps illuminate the kinds of repercussions that the rhetoric of assimilation could have on the Latino community.

As recognized previously, Latinos were already disposed to accepting the rhetoric of assimilation, or it would never have appealed to them as a collective action frame. The

use of the frame, however, serves to reinforce and perpetuate the idea that an immigrant's heritage must be rejected before he or she can become worthy of certain rights, and completely ignores the concerns of family and friends that immigrants are connected with in their home countries. Due to the presence of alternative frames during the rallies, such as the self-directed affirming rhetoric described above, it is difficult to say how deeply the assimilation frame penetrated into the Latino community, and from there, how profoundly it was internalized. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the negative consequences that this kind of frame, despite its good intentions, can have on the identity of a marginalized population, which includes Latinos in the United States as well as the citizens of Latin American countries.

Thus we see how the collective action frame employed during the immigration rights rallies of 2006 came into being, as well as the limitations of this frame and its potential effects on the identity of movement participants. This exploration has given many insights into the nature of U.S. society and the important consequences that collective action frames have on identity. The struggle over immigration reform is not yet over, however, and it will be interesting to see if the movement will adjust its frame to counter the kind of rhetoric put forth in Chapter 4, move in a completely new direction, or die out altogether.

Many, in fact, have commented that the passion and fervor displayed at the immigration rallies in the spring of 2006 did fizzle out quickly. Part of the reason for this loss of energy may have been the delay in Congress on the immigration reform proposals. The new Congress elected in the fall of 2006 will be responsible for once again taking up

the questions of reform. In some of the coverage after the height of the rallies, the question arose as to whether or not this mobilization would lead to the political stimulation of the Latino voting population.¹ Voter registration drives were often held alongside the rallies, and another popular slogan was “March today, Vote tomorrow.”² Perhaps the possibilities for a strong Latino presence in the voting process will present an opportunity for a unification of different approaches to promoting the Latino agenda. While votes are needed to address injustices both domestically and internationally, the organizers of the 2006 movement clearly felt confined to addressing the more numerous and powerful mainstream voting population. By converting themselves into a population that does not need to convince other voters of their worthiness in order to gain certain rights, Latinos would be able to promote their own agenda through the political process. Whether or not that agenda will be one aimed at raising the sort of radical consciousness developed in the 1960s, or whether it will reveal that assimilation was not simply a tactic, is currently unknown.

¹ Uranga, Rachel and Rodriguez, Monica, May 7, 2006, “Immigrant activists focus on political participation.”

² Sample, Herbert, April 22, 2006, “Latinos on march – to the polls?”

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Appendix 1

Timeline of Immigration Rallies in the Spring of 2006

Between February and May of 2006, rallies, protests, marches, and work stoppages took place across the United States in an effort to speak out in favor of immigrant rights. While it is difficult to compile a comprehensive and accurate list of these actions and the numbers of people participating, below is an attempt to document, at least in part, the scope of the protests.

February

- **February 14:** 2,000 protest at the “Day Without an Immigrant” in Philadelphia, PA.

March

- **March 8:** 40,000 rally in Washington D.C.
- **March 10:** 100,000 march in Chicago, IL.
- **March 23:** 10,000-15,000 march in Milwaukee, WI.
- **March 24:** 20,000 march in Phoenix, AZ.
- **March 25:**
 - 500,000-750,000 march in Los Angeles, CA.
 - 50,000 protest in Denver, CO.
 - 200+ protest in Cleveland, OH.
- **March 26:** 7,000 rally in Columbus, OH.
- **March 27:**
 - 50,000 march in Detroit, MI.
 - 125,000 participate in school walk-outs in Los Angeles, CA.
- **March 29:** 8,000-9,000 march in Nashville, TN.
- **March 31:**
 - 3,000 participate in school walk-outs in Las Vegas, NV.
 - 6,000 participate in school walk-outs in San Diego, CA.

April

- **April 1:**
 - 2,000+ rally in Oklahoma City, OK.
 - 10,000 march in New York City, NY.
- **April 6:** 200+ participate in school walk-outs in Aurora, IL.
- **April 8:** 200+ rally in San Diego, CA.
- **April 9:**

- 350,000-500,000 march in Dallas, TX.
- 50,000 march in San Diego, CA.
- 40,000 march in St. Paul, MN.
- 6,000 rally in Des Moines, IA.
- **April 10:** Protests occur in 102 cities and towns across the United States, including the following:
 - 50,000 rally in Atlanta, GA.
 - 2,000 march in Boston, MA.
 - 4,000 protest in Charleston, SC.
 - 75,000 protest in Fort Myers, FL.
 - 1,000 protest in Pensacola, FL.
 - 3,000 march in Grand Junction, CO.
 - 10,000-20,000 protest in Indianapolis, IN.
 - 3,000 march in Las Vegas, NV.
 - 100,000 protest in Phoenix, AZ.
 - 70,000-125,000 protest in New York City, NY.
 - 10,000 demonstrate in Oakland, CA.
 - 25,000 demonstrate in San Jose, CA.
 - 15,000 rally in Salt Lake City UT.
 - 18,000 march in San Antonio, TX.
 - 15,000-20,000 march in Seattle, WA.
 - Other cities included Reno, NV, Washington D.C., Lexington, KY, Knoxville and Memphis, TN, Austin, TX, and Los Angeles, CA.
- **April 11:**
 - 300+ rally in Las Vegas, NV.
 - 200 participate in a school walk-out in Carson City, NV.
 - 2,000-4,000 march in Reno, NV.
- **April 28:** The Spanish language version of the Star Spangled Banner, *Nuestro Himno*, is played simultaneously on approximately 500 Spanish language radio stations in the United States.

May

- **May 1:** The nationally organized “Great American Boycott” takes place across the United States, including the following demonstrations:
 - 75,000 protest in Denver, CO
 - 600,000 in Los Angeles, CA.
 - 10,000 in Modesto, CA.
 - 55,000 in San Francisco, CA.
 - 2,000 in El Paso, TX.
 - 400,000 in Chicago, IL.
 - 2,000-2,500 in Boston, MA.
 - 7,000-10,000 in Las Vegas, NV.
 - 15,000 in Philadelphia, PA.

- 10,000-20,000 in Orlando, FL.
- 3,000-5,000 in Madison, WI.
- 70,000 in Milwaukee, WI.
- 200,000 in New York City, NY.
- 8,000 in Portland, OR.
- 15,000-20,000 in Providence, RI.

Sources:

Wikipedia, April 27, 2007, "Great American Boycott."

Wikipedia, April 25, 2007, "2006 United States immigration reform protests."

Ferre, Ines, et al, May 1, 2006, "Thousands march for immigrant rights: Schools businesses feel impact as students, workers walk out."

Appendix 2

Photo Documentation of Rallies in Various Cities in California and Philadelphia, PA.

Various sources of media were used to document rallies across the country. Below are some of the efforts to document rallies through photography in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Alameda, Berkeley, and Oakland, California, as well as in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1. The five photos below were taken at the February 14th rally in Philadelphia, PA, as documented by the Philadelphia Independent Media Center.







Source: Couch, Aaron, February 14, 2006, "Photos from Immigrant Demonstration,"
<<http://phillyimc.org/en/2006/02/18969.shtml>>.

2. Below are two pictures of protesters and signs used at the March 25th rally in Los Angeles, as documented by the Los Angeles Independent Media Center.



Source: Manuel, A., March 26, 2006, "The Great Los Angeles March Against Racism: An Indigenous Perspective," <<http://la.indymedia.org/news/2006/03/151648.php?theme=default>>.

3. The following six photos document various rallies in California that took place on May 1st, 2006, and are credited to field reporters from the Youth Radio Organization.



San Francisco



Alameda



Berkeley



Berkeley



Oakland



Los Angeles

Sources:

Harris, Sara, "Protest in Los Angeles," <<http://youthradio.org/politics/immigrationindex.shtml>>. Tejada, Wilmer, "From the Field," <<http://youthradio.org/politics/immigrationindex.shtml>>.